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Labor Needs A Radical Vision
Fighting for a better world can inspire workers to organize **6**

IWW truckers draw attention
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EnerSys settles labor charges for $7.75 million

Company sues union-buster for malpractice

Battery manufacturer EnerSys Inc., which closed its Sumter, South Carolina, plant in November 2001, has filed a malpractice suit against its attorneys, saying Jackson Lewis "engineered" what EnerSys refers to as a "relentless and unlawful campaign to oust the union" from the plant.

The company is trying to recover $7.75 million it agreed to pay to former employees to settle unfair labor practice charges for unlawful firings, including the firing of seven union officials, spying on workers, improper implementation of a "gainsharing" incentive plan, illegal withdrawal of union recognition, and failure to give notice of the Sumter plant's closing to the union.

IUE attorney Stephen Koslow says the settlement was no victory for workers. "The settlement and money the workers received in no way compensates for what they lost economically," he said. "I can't conceive of a settlement that would compensate these employees for what they actually lost."

"This case is remarkable because it's revealing in court documents for the first time how union busting really works," said David Bonior, chair of American Rights at Work. "This is a story that deals with a variety of problems: money under the table, illegal firing of workers and just terror in the workplace and it happens all across this nation."

Workers at the EnerSys plant began organizing in 1994, and management hired Jackson Lewis, which specializes in labor law, for an anti-union campaign. But on Feb. 23, 1995, workers voted 191 to 185 to unionize.

EnerSys then refused to bargain with the International Union of Electronics workers, instead appealing the results of the election. Two years later the U.S. Court of Appeals ordered the company to recognize the union and commence bargaining.

Eager to secure a first contract, the IUE agreed to a three-year contract under which workers accepted pay cuts in exchange for a "gainsharing" incentive pay plan. Workers quickly found their paychecks slashed by an average of 16 percent. A company human resources director later admitted to an arbitrator that management had cooked the books to avoid making the gainsharing payments.

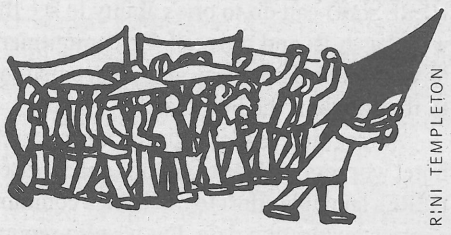
Management used dissatisfaction with the contract to stir up anti-union sentiment. A maintenance worker who led an anti-union campaign at the plant testified that a management consultant advised him on how to go about ousting the union and helped him craft fliers and letters that were widely circulated in the plant and the community. Envelopes of cash to finance the campaign were delivered

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Flying squads:

An important tool for labour

BY PAUL BOCKING



RINI TEMPLETON

Workers and allies in Peterborough, Ontario, have initiated formation of a rank-and- file labour solidarity network. A local Wobbly was inspired by many of his coworkers at a recently unionized workplace, who, having just gone through the struggle of union recognition and contract negotiations, were familiar with workplace struggle and recognized the importance of solidarity to its success. IWW members and supporters joined with local labour activists to form this group and promote it within their union locals and among interested allies.

The Peterborough Labour Flying Squad informs its members of upcoming labour actions, such as strikes requiring picket line support, demonstrations or public forums on relevant issues, and coordinates the active solidarity of participants, in consultation with the group or individual requesting assistance. Our flying squad embraces workers across *all unions, alongside their* non-union, retired or unemployed fellow workers citywide.

"Flying Squads" are organized to be able to mobilize and respond rapidly. In Ontario, workers have long utilized the potential power of flying squads. Most notably in the auto sector, they played a pivotal role in the strike which secured the unionization of Ford plants in Ontario in 1943, and were revived in the late nineties within the Canadian Auto Workers union. Flying squads also hold significant potential for providing support for community-based struggles. Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees at York University in Toronto formed a flying squad which since 2000 has been a reliable presence at community actions initiated by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and in local labour struggles.

Flying Squads serve an important purpose within the labour movement that Wobblies endeavour to support and cultivate. They present a mechanism that enables rank-and-file workers to be aware of ongoing labour and social justice struggles in their city and provides a way for them to get involved. Within mainstream unions, ideally it facilitates direct communication between rank-and-file members, leading to action, without being mediated by the union leadership. The Peterborough Labour Flying Squad is not dependent on any union, organization or political party, thereby maintaining its autonomy.

An inspiration for us was the grassroots "Prepare the General Strike" committee of British Columbia. Responding to the failure of the top-down strategies employed by the province's union leadership to reverse the hyper-neoliberal policies employed by its current premier, rank-and-file workers and labour activists formed this independent movement to tap into labour's great potential power. The Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition was founded in Toronto in the fall of 2004, coinciding with the formation of our group.

Peterborough's flying squad has expanded substantially over the past few months. Nearly 50 people have signed on to the network, many as active participants. Members include academic assistants and part-time faculty at

***Flying Squads:** continued page 4*

We won't buy jobs!

Chicago bike messengers reject independent contractor scam

BY SCOTT GIBSON, CHICAGO

Nearly a dozen bicycle messengers and community activists staged an informational picket outside of Standard Courier's West Grand Avenue office Dec. 20 to protest the company's decision to strip workers of their employee status and make them into independent contractors.

The picketers, representing the Stop NICA! Committee, were also upset about Standard owner Robert Henzel's decision to use the services of the National Independent Contractors Association to implement this change. The group braved below-zero wind chills to offer passers-by leaflets with information about NICA and NICA's founder, Thomas McGrath. According to the web site of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, "McGrath was convicted of mail and wire fraud in 1996 ... for offering forged workers compensation certificates."

The leaflet recounts stories of NICA not paying insurance claims on couriers who were supposedly covered by the company, and notes that several companies rejected NICA because of their workers' pressure to do so.

Matt Kellard, a spokesman for the SNC, said that the picket was prompted by word that Standard's management planned on firing anyone who would not join NICA and sign a new agreement making them independent contractors. Kellard said Henzel's decision was a reaction to recent rulings by the Illinois Department of Employment Security and the National Labor Relations Board labeling Standard's messengers as employees, with the legal right to collective action and unemployment claims.

One of SNC members' primary problems with NICA is that they see it as a "pay to work" scheme. Kellard said that when a company signs on with NICA, their workers begin paying out as much as $25 per week as an affiliation fee. This is a non-negotiable fee that workers must pay to be hired. Bicyclists pay even more, according to one biker's pay stub, with an additional "NICA Bike" fee of five dollars being added.

The Committee began distributing flyers in the days between when the group found out that Standard management had decided to "go NICA" and the December 21 deadline they had given employees to, as SNC puts it, "pay up or get out."

One messenger refused to return to work because of the new policy. "[One of the office managers] told me that we had to sign it, or we didn't need to work there. So I just haven't been back."

Standard Courier has had a history of labor disputes in recent months. Last summer a group of messengers asked management to change a uniform policy, which resulted in the firing of one messenger and the pressuring out of at least three others. The terminated worker filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge with the NLRB. That case was settled out of court after the NLRB issued a complaint against Standard.

The Dept. of Employment Security also declared workers at Standard employees after a terminated biker applied for unemployment. The agency uses a test involving level of direction by an employer to determine whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor. Employees are eligible for unemployment, and their employers are required to pay for unemployment insurance. Independent contractors are technically self-employed, and therefore not eligible for either unemployment or protections under the National Labor Relations Act.

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Losing the right to organize

As of this writing, labor union organizing is still legal in the U.S. But court decision after court decision have chipped away at the right to organize until unions might as well be illegal. (Just try exercising your legal right to organize a union inside Wal-Mart.) Therefore, pre-Wagner Act (1935) organizing techniques, dating back to when unions *were* illegal, are worth reconsidering.

Forget about making winning a contract the goal of organizing. As we are seeing in the current rash of corporate bankruptcy cases where union-negotiated retirement benefits are being tossed out the window, contracts aren't binding when workers' rights are concerned.

In this context, switching to the tactic of what is now called solidarity unionism makes sense. Don't wait until you have a majority on the job to try to improve things; direct action by a handful of minority unionists can be effective in winning small victories that will pave the way to larger victories.

Organize networks of solidarity, and avoid the NLRB and formal union recognition/contract negotiations unless the circumstances seem particularly favorable to the union. Avoid walk-out strikes in favor of striking on the job. Consider slowdowns (what the Brazilians call "working sadly") or one-hour work stoppages, sick-ins, or even all the workers coming down with simultaneous urges to talk to the boss.

Concerted actions against speed-ups could include not working overtime, not taking work-related phone calls at home, and not taking laptops on airplanes. Organize a local "bring your kids to work" day – it never hurts to remind the bosses that workers have lives outside the workplace. In the old days, Wobbly loggers won the eight-hour day by simply refusing to work longer, and today we can win it back with the same method.

If slow-downs aren't possible, food servers can always serve double portions, bus drivers and toll booth operators can skip collective fares. Teachers could give all As, or teach labor economics and history. Workers who have contact with the public could spend company time giving customers the inside story.

Penny Pixler



IW biased and untrue

I have just read the December issue of the *Industrial Worker* and I have to say that I am incredibly disheartened to see the unhelpful, biased and blatantly untrue stance that the *IW* has taken on several recent labor news stories.

In regards to the Local 54 Atlantic City strike, the Local 2 lockout and strike and the split developing in the AFL-CIO, it seems that the *IW* can't see through its own prejudice against business unionism to see the good and healthy writing on the wall.

In Atlantic City, a union that had not fought for years stepped up to the plate against large multinationals and won wage and health insurance increases when the company was asking for concessions. A month-long strike is nothing to look down your nose at.

In San Francisco, thousands of heroic workers struck for two weeks and then were locked out for over a month. It was a long and bitter battle. Workers in Monterrey and Hawaii honored picket lines, and tens of thousands of hotel workers around the country took part in solidarity actions.

In both San Francisco and Atlantic City dozens of workers were arrested in acts of civil disobedience, yet you focus on the fact that Teamsters were working the front desk, even though for over two weeks they honored UNITE HERE's picket line. Both these fights also involved a large plan to line up contracts nationwide, so that hospitality workers could engage in nationwide fights and act like a nationwide union. All of this is part of the last major item, the split in the AFL-CIO.

The *IW*'s stance seems to be that no matter what SEIU, UNITE HERE or the New Unity Partnership do, they are just as bad as Lane Kirkland. This is false and it's that stance, that constant picking apart of all other unions, that will and has in many aspects resigned the IWW to the dustbin of history.

I am a Wobbly, and have been for eight years now, but it is disgusting to watch something that should be organizing workers to fight the boss do nothing, *nothing*, but bash other unions. Especially at a time when many other unions are fighting in far more inventive ways then even the IWW is currently using.

The IWW and *IW* need to be a voice for workers and a tool to build a movement and an organization. We are not supposed to be a watchdog of other unions. We are not the Association for Union Democracy; we are not a sectarian political organization. The IWW is a union and the *IW* is its newspaper.

To the IWW, please function like a union and organize workers. To the *IW* please act like a newspaper and report the news about union fights from a working class perspective and not from the point of view of an outdated sectarian organization.

Chuck Hendricks, Chicago

Editor's Note: This letter shows what years of dedicated work in a fundamentally undemocratic apparatus (the author is on UNITE HERE staff) can do to one's ability to see the world as it is, and to recall the commitment to workplace democracy and justice that led to that work in the first place.

As regular readers know, we covered hotel workers' solidarity actions and stressed HERE's laudable effort to establish a common contract expiration date. But we also reported, and this is what FW Hendricks objects to, union officials' decision to abandon that effort in favor of stand-still contracts. Far from winning wage and health insurance increases in Atlantic City, for example, HERE signed a contract that provides no wage hikes in the first year (for all five years for workers with less than eight years on the job), and allows the boss to take the health plan to arbitration if its cost rises too fast. Workers fought hard in Atlantic City (and Wobblies joined them on their picket lines), but the fact remains that they were defeated.

The scabbing that undercut these struggles (like the undemocratic structures that plague the business unions) is not a side issue – it is a fundamental reason why American unions are in a head-long retreat. The energy the AFL is putting into schemes to assign jurisdiction, to arrange mergers of its smaller affiliates, or to squander even more union funds on politicians would be far better spent developing solidarity among the rank and file – the kind of solidarity that would once again make crossing picket lines unthinkable.

Finally, it is simply ludicrous to say that we do nothing but bash other unions. The IWW currently is organizing on a larger scale than at any time since the 1940s. We have been on the front lines supporting short-haul truckers in their organizing, and also have important campaigns underway in municipal transport, retail and public service sectors. At a time when most unions are losing ground, the IWW continues to grow – precisely because we reject the constraints of the anti-labor law regime, insist on full democracy, and support workers in their struggles.

We foot bill for scab nurses

A strike by registered nurses at St. John's Hospital here in St. Louis is being closely watched by labor activists. The question is, will other area hospital workers be able to form unions and strike the way the nurses at St. John's have?

Naturally, hospital bosses are doing their best to undermine the strike. This includes hiring scabs from a company in Colorado. While U.S. Nursing Corp. flies in scabs, workers are being shown just who's side the government is on. The airports used to fly in the scabs are subsidized by the federal government – both directly and by letting them issue tax free bonds. The rich capitalists who buy these bonds do not pay income taxes on the interest. Since you and I have to pay the taxes the rich evade, these bonds are in fact subsidized by us. *continued next page*

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Pittsburgh action backs tsunami victims

Members of No Sweatshops Bucco! and the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance gathered on the Roberto Clemente Bridge New Years Eve, urging the Pittsburgh Pirates to help save the jobs of textile workers in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia who make the baseball team's logo merchandise.

The international Multi Fiber Arrangement expired Dec. 31, ending a system under which countries export fixed levels of garments to industrialized countries. IWW member Kenneth Miller told reporters MFA expiration could cost tens of thousands of garment workers in the tsunami-affected region their jobs, and called on Pirates management to intervene to preserve those jobs. "Everything made there should be maintained. It's the most significant contribution we could make. It's saving the work they've been doing for 30 years."

"When we exposed sweatshops in Honduras, baseball dumped the contractor," he said. "They could freeze those jobs. Otherwise the factory owners won't rebuild. They'll take the work to China where workers have no protections and make 8 cents an hour."

IWW loses Dare election

Workers at Dare Family Services in Boston have voted to decertify the IWW as their collective bargaining representative. Out of a nine-member bargaining unit, five workers voted against the union and three voted for it. Dare provides group homes for mentally-retarded adults. Two years ago, workers voted unanimously to organize with the IWW, citing the need for respect from management above all other concerns.

Dare management refused to bargain with the workers until compelled by the filing of an unfair labor practice complaint, and so delayed and obstructed negotiations that as of the December election, the parties were still far from agreeing on a contract despite 18 months of negotiations.

A non-profit corporation under contract with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, Dare paid more than $100,000 to a union-busting lawyer in its effort to frustrate the workers' efforts to gain respect and end arbitrary discipline.

The IWW made significant gains for the workers, including pressure that resulted in the firing of a particularly abusive manager. However, few members of the job branch were active in union work, and the job branch never developed the solidarity and sense of common purpose necessary for a strong union.

Despite the sustained efforts of a few members, the Boston General Membership Branch was unable to offer the assistance the workers needed, in particular by working with them to develop a workplace and community campaign to bring pressure on Dare to engage in meaningful negotiations. Such pressure was essential, as workers could not strike without endangering their clients.

News of the petition for decertification came as a surprise to union activists on the job. Most of the workers behind the petition refused to discuss their complaints with union supporters or with Jim Crutchfield, the General Executive Board member who had helped with contract negotiations for nearly a year. The one who was willing to speak with Crutchfield said, "We're grateful" that the IWW helped get rid of the abusive manager, but that the union was no longer needed now that he was gone.

A false rumor, apparently planted by management, had circulated that the job delegate had filed a lawsuit against Dare without consulting the other workers, and this was cited by some dissenters as a basis for their dissatisfaction with the IWW. Management also exploited personal conflicts among some workers, and promoted one union supporter into management ranks.

Union supporters remain on the job, and hope to maintain an active union presence.

NLRB: Starbucks violated workers' rights

The National Labor Relations Board has issued a complaint against Starbucks alleging that the company has been "interfering with, restraining, and coercing employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed [by federal labor law]." The NLRB further alleges that Starbucks has been unlawfully discriminating against pro-union employees. The complaint comes as a result of unfair labor practice charge filed by the Industrial Workers of the World.

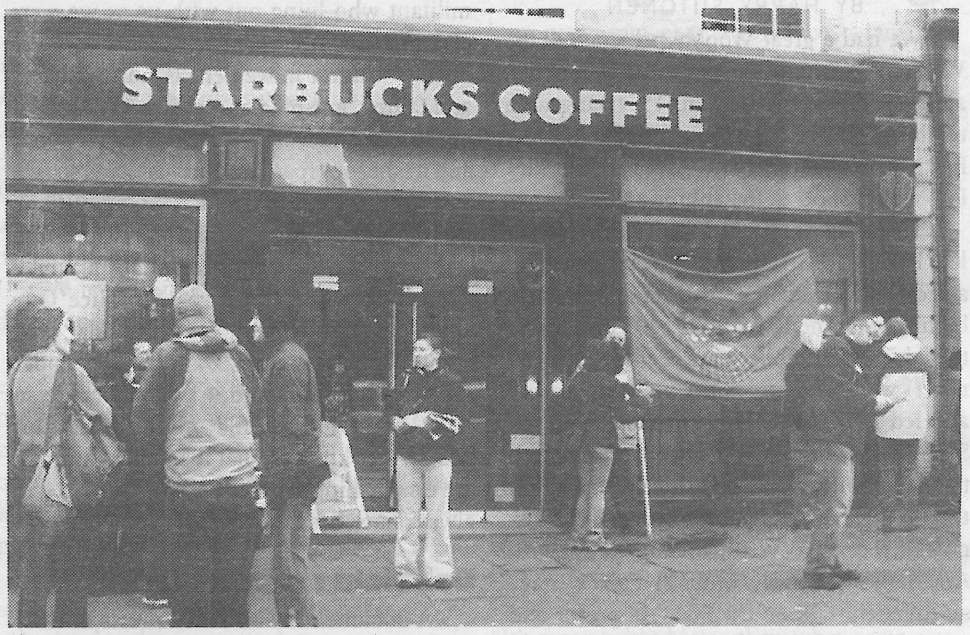
"Chairman Howard Schultz tells the world that Starbucks respects its employees but in fact the company systematically violates workers' rights," said Daniel Gross, a Starbucks worker and IWW member.

According to the NLRB complaint, seven Starbucks officials broke the law in the course of the union-busting campaign. The complaint names Starbucks Senior Vice President Martin Annesse, in charge of the company's vast Northeast operations, as one of those engaging in anti-union intimidation. "This is obviously not a case of a few bad apples," noted worker Anthony Polanco. "Starbucks Coffee Company is rotten to its core."

The complaint alleges that Starbucks created an impression of surveillance among employees to deter them from supporting the union; threatened workers with loss of wages and benefits if they supported the union; promised to promote pro-union workers if they withdrew their support for the union; refused to allow workers to wear pro-union buttons; and distributed baseball tickets and other bribes in an effort to convince employees to withdraw support for the union.

Criminal charges dropped

The Manhattan district attorney has meanwhile dismissed criminal charges against Daniel Gross, who was arrested August 28 during a peaceful rally outside the Manhattan Starbucks where workers organized into the IWW last year. Charges against Anthony Polanco had been dismissed earlier.



20 IWW and Zapatista supporters picketed an Edinburgh Starbucks outlet.

Wobblies picketed a Starbucks outlet in Edinburgh, Scotland, January 8 in solidarity with the New York baristas. Numerous people were turned away from the cafe after talking to picketers during the three-hour picket line mounted jointly by IWW members and Zapatista supporters. Smaller actions took place in Hull, England, and Madison, Wisconsin.

The campaign also continues to draw media coverage. On January 13, the Workers Independent News service aired a story about organizing efforts at Starbucks, which opened: "It's been a rough start to the year for Starbucks. In Florida, a federal court judge granted collective action status to a lawsuit filed by two managers who say they are entitled to overtime pay because they are actually 'glorified baristas' and not true managers. ... Meanwhile, in New York City, workers represented by the Industrial Workers of the World watched as the National Labor Relations Board agreed with their charges that the coffee chain has been 'interfering with, restraining and coercing employees' who have attempted to unionize."

(You can hear the story at www.LaborRadio.org; go to Browse Headline Archives and click on the January 13 link.)

Letter: Scab nurses...

The same is true of the bonds financing hospital construction – the wealthy bond holders do not pay taxes on hospital bonds, so we have to pay them. Everywhere, the story is the same. The federal and state transportation infrastructure is made available to strike breakers without a peep. As the old song says, "Which side are you on?"

Robert G. Rice, St. Louis

Editor's Note: It should not be forgotten that union workers maintain electric, telephone and mail service to this scabherding outfit, and operate the airplanes which convey the scabs (although airline workers are not in a position to block them until the union compiles a list of known scabs and makes it available, as professional scabs are not in the habit of announcing their dirty business).

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under $1,000, dues are $6 a month. If your monthly income is between $1,000 - $2,000, dues are $12 a month. If your monthly income is over $2,000 a month, dues are $18 a month.

- ❑ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ❑ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ❑ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

Western workers labor cultural festival

BY HARRY SIITONEN

We had a great Wobbly presence at the Western Workers Labor Cultural Festival at San Jose, California, Jan. 15. I sang with my labor chorus in the morning, and at the Festival's request we had a 100th anniversary IWW workshop in the afternoon.

The room was packed, with hardly a chair left. FW Obo Help organized the program and acted as MC. I led off with a talk on historical highlights of the IWW from 1905 until up to the edge of the modern era. Faith Petric (89 now!) went into our music and arts culture and led us all in singing "Preacher and the Slave" and "Popular Wobbly." Steve Ongerth talked about popular misconceptions about the IWW. Sara Zesmer and Bruce Valde discussed recent IWW organizing campaigns. And lapsed Wobbly Lincoln Fairley gave an excellent talk on the IWW in poster and graphic arts. Everybody seemed to like our workshop, which kicked off our 100th anniversary efforts.

We were wondering why this great interest in our workshop. A Painters Union militant who hung out with us as we were cleaning up, suggested it was because the business union movement is hurting badly and failing, grasping at top-down reorganizing straws, and workers are looking for better and fresher approaches. Our history is so rich and what we're doing now is so innovative!

Of course we know that a class approach is the only way to deal with capitalism, which doesn't even pretend to be Mr. Nice Guy anymore – they're going for the jugular. And many of these unionists are chafing under the dead hand of top-down bureaucracy, so our IWW rank and file unionism has appeal. Who knows what'll happen, but we are establishing respect for what we are and always have been.

Goldfield documentary

A documentary on IWW efforts in early 1900s Goldfield, brutally repressed by mine thugs and federal troops, recently premiered at the Nevada State Museum. "Goldfield: A New World Order, Failure of a Dream" features IWW organizer Vincent St. John.

Farewell, Fellow Worker: Carlos Cortez

As this issue goes to press, we have just received word that Carlos Cortez, who joined the IWW in 1947 and served as editor of this newspaper for many years, died Jan. 18.

FW Cortez worked a wide variety of jobs, while doing his part for the One Big Union on the side. He was an internationally known artist, and his linoleum cuts and other work frequently graced these pages. His column, "Left Side," ran in the *Industrial Worker* for many decades. Our next issue will feature a tribute to Carlos. In the meantime, you can read about him online at: http://centerstage.net/literature/whoswho/CarlosCortez.html and see his poems, artwork and an interview at: www.rebelgraphics.org/carloscortez.html.

Indian unionists discuss outsourcing

Members of the New Trade Union Initiative, an organization of independent unions in India, recently toured the United States to discuss outsourcing.

"We got a much better idea of how outsourcing is dislocating families and employees here," said Ashim Roy, president of unions representing General Electric workers in Gujarat. "But we have also tried to convey to our working brothers here that there are issues beyond just jobs going from here. When jobs go from here to India, China or the Philippines, they go places where there are no labor standards, where workers don't have the capacity to raise wages, because they don't have the ability to organize," Roy said.

He also noted the differing working conditions in both countries. "An average worker here may work 40 hours where in India he or she works 60 hours. An Indian worker is given only one minute to answer a call, as opposed to five minutes to an American call center worker."

Along with outsourcing, there is also downsizing. "The process is not that the Indian worker is taking away a job, but rather a classic example of a job being lost – so three workers are fighting for one job. Jobs in general are going down," he contended. "If you look at it as 'my job' and 'your job,' then you cannot reach a reconciliation. But if you look at it as an issue of rights of workers, then there could be a meeting point."

V. Chandra said that she and others in her group want to explore "how the corporate sector systematically wants to divide us. ... Global regulations can be done through international labor organizations, have a dialogue and put forward demands. It is a long-term struggle, but it will work eventually," she said , adding, "Many here are now convinced that it is not the Indian worker that has stolen the job."

Which side are you on?

BY ERIC LEE



The torture and murder of Hadi Saleh marks a turning point for unions around the world. The question is now posed, to quote the famous American union song, "Which side are you on?"

Let me explain. Hadi Saleh represented everything unionists should hold dear – he was a committed socialist, survived repression (including a spell in Saddam's jails) and exile, and was helping to build an new and independent union movement in Iraq for the first time in more than a generation. He was the international officer of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU).

It was in that capacity that I met him last year in the coffee bar of the Trades Union Congress in London. He spoke little English and I spoke even less Arabic, but we were able to communicate through our mutual friend Abdullah Muhsin, the IFTU's foreign representative. We discussed how the IFTU could make the best use of its web site, which we had originally produced in English. We were discussing the importance of an edition in Arabic as well. Abdullah later showed Hadi how to add content to the site when he returned to Baghdad.

On January 4, Hadi Saleh was tortured and murdered by Ba'athist thugs in his home in Baghdad. According to one report, "They bound him hand and foot and they blindfolded him. They beat and they burned his flesh. Once they had finished torturing him, they strangled him with an electric cord. As a final touch, they riddled his body with bullets."

He is not the first Iraqi unionist to be targeted by the so-called "resistance." In a press release issued five days before Hadi's murder, the IFTU wrote that it "denounced ... further attacks on its members on the railway line between Basra and an-Nasiriyyah and on union premises in Baghdad. These criminal acts designed to intimidate workers and trade unionists follow a well-established pattern of targeted campaigns of assassination and terror which have been waged by those loyal to the former fascist-type, dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein against individual IFTU activists and ordinary workers in recent months."

It should not surprise us that the last remaining loyalists of the Saddam regime would target unionists. After all, people like Hadi Saleh and Abdullah Muhsin were jailed and exiled during the decades of Ba'athist rule. Independent unions were not tolerated in Iraq. Only the state-controlled General Federation of Trade Unions was allowed to exist, and it was under the direct control of Saddam's family and cronies.

Hadi Saleh was killed because unionists represent an important part of the new civil society emerging in the wake of the fall of the Ba'athist regime. Whatever one thinks of the U.S.-led invasion – which Hadi Saleh and his comrades opposed – what we should all be able to agree on today is the need to rebuild civil society in that long-suffering country.

Most unions in the world do seem to understand this, and the outcry following Hadi's murder was world-wide and comprehensive. It involved not only official national trade union centers like the AFL-CIO, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Trades Union Congress in Britain, but also groups like U.S. Labor Against the War. USLAW, which played a key role in opposing the invasion and which continues to oppose the occupation, has taken a firm stand of nevertheless supporting the emerging unions in Iraq, and has raised money for the IFTU and other organizations. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, representing 148 million unionized workers around the globe, declared: "This vicious murder is nothing less than an attack on the right of Iraqi workers to trade union representation."

But some have been reluctant to add their voices to the global protest.

In Britain, a group called the Stop the War Coalition, led by top figures in the British Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party and financially supported by some unions, has been denouncing the IFTU as quislings, a "fake union," tools of the occupiers, traitors and so on for weeks. Other opponents of the war and occupation have severely criticized them for doing so, pointing out that doing so could endanger the lives of Iraqi unionists who could now be targeted by the "resistance."

One very prominent left-wing union leader quit the Stop the War Coalition a few weeks before Hadi's murder, warning precisely of this sort of thing. In a letter, Mick Rix, formerly the general secretary of the train drivers union ASLEF, wrote, "The language that was used [by the Stop the War Coalition] was deliberate, archaic, violent, and plain downright stupid and dangerous if you happen to be an Iraqi at this present time."

In the struggle between independent unions on the one side and a coalition of Ba'athists and Islamo-fascists on the other, the choice for unionists and others on the left should not be a difficult one. No more difficult than the one posed by the song, which tells us that "there are no neutrals" and asks of each of us, "Will you be a lousy scab – Or will you be a man?"

Iraqi unionists seek end to occupation & terrorism

"The workers movement [is] living in a hell created by western militarism, and political Islam," says a recent appeal by the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq asking unions around the world to demand the immediate withdrawal of occupation forces, full workers' rights, equal rights for women, and an end to religious control of the state and educational system.

"The whole society is encountering hunger and unemployment. The people of Iraq are deprived of basic daily needs such as security, employment, medicine and secular administration to protect the lives and rights of the people. The people are in grave danger ...

"Our appeal ... is to support the other force which stands against the terrorist front... It was you who stood against the war on Iraq and it gave the people of Iraq great hope and proved that our world is not only a terrorist graveyard or a warmongers' world. ... If we unite, then the world would change to a ... world free of terror and terrorism – an egalitarian world with freedom for all."

The Federation is also demanding repeal of the Ba'athist and occupation regime's anti-labor laws and the right to form unions independent of the state and free of government control. Currently, the government recognizes only the FTUI, which is linked to the occupation regime.

The Federation-affiliated Union of Unemployed issued a statement condemning the recent wave of kidnappings and murders of foreign workers, which is helping to finance the "resistance" through ransom payments. "The Union of Unemployed in Iraq condemns these practices against workers who have nothing to do with the occupation and who struggle to guarantee the livelihood for their families. ... Workers' lives cannot be used as tools in rejecting the inhuman and brutal practices of the USA and allied forces. Workers are not commodities for financial and political exchange."

The Federation notes that the so-called "resistance" is in no way preferable to the occupation regime. "The armed confrontation between the two poles of terrorism in Iraq, the U.S. forces on the one hand and the Islamo-ethnocentric 'resistance' on the other, has deliberately turned living and working places into battlefields. ...

"Not only is this 'resistance' unconcerned with the well-being, prosperity and daily needs of the people ... it attempts to impose the most backward and reactionary values, traditions and ways of living on people."

The Federation is aligned with the Worker-communist Party of Iraq (the FTUI is aligned with the Iraqi Communist Party, which has a seat on the U.S.-appointed interim council).

Flying Squads...

continued from page 1

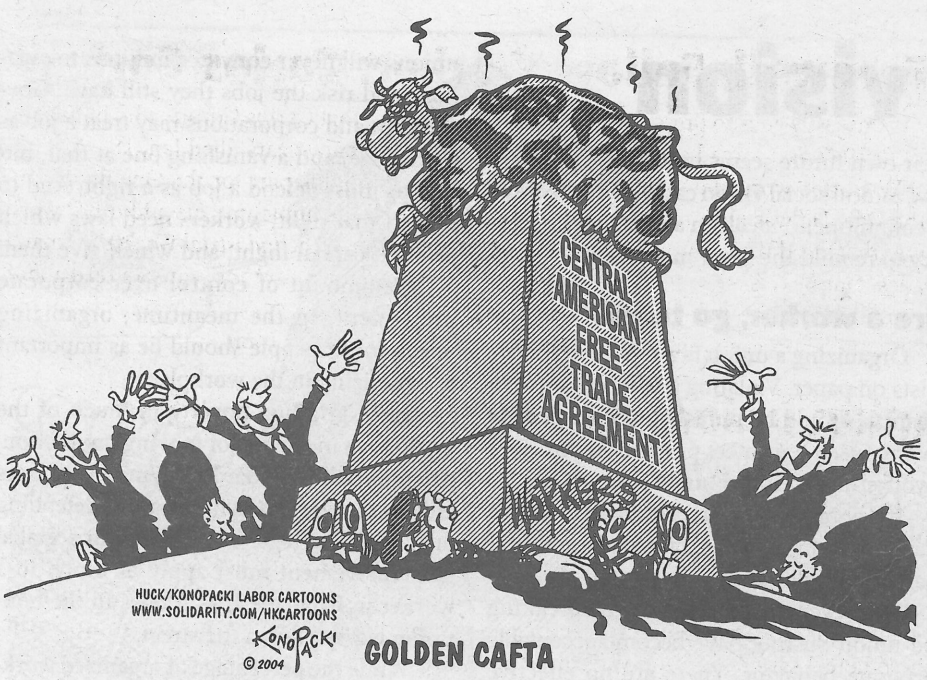
the local university, factory workers, students, school teachers, hospital and postal workers, call centre, and restaurant workers. Crucially, the flying squad unites non-union workers, such as those in the last two categories, who otherwise may not have a way to participate in the labour movement. It can also serve them at their workplace, where outside group support could strengthen the resistance of workers inside. Further, a flying squad can act as a means to assist these workers in organizing their workplace. Toward this end, we have facilitated the meeting of Flying Squad members who work in the same non-union sector to discuss their concerns along with their coworkers.

The Peterborough flying squad was officially launched at a public forum on current workplace issues and strategies for resistance last November. The event was well attended, and its extensive promotion announced our existence to a wide audience. Highlights included performances by veteran labour singers Fellow Worker (an IWW member) and George Hewisson. To date, the flying squad has attended a public meeting on service and job cuts in local health care, a small rally for the rights of rural postal workers, a mass demonstration for workers' rights and marched in solidarity with other struggles.

Workers in various sectors have engaged in a number of major strikes locally in the past few years, and Peterborough has also seen the growth of predominantly non-union industries, such as call centres. The Peterborough Labour Flying Squad and its counterparts may have a significant role to play in the upcoming struggles.

Australian Wobblies confront fascists at union hall

The Sydney IWW organized a march Jan. 19 to confront fascists – members of the "Australian Youth Alliance," a "patriotic" grouping calling for a white Australia, an end to immigration, and the arming of civilians of "sound character" – marching on the Sydney offices of the CFMEU construction and forestry workers union.



GOLDEN CAFTA

Central American Free Trade Agreement delayed

The Bush administration is delaying submitting CAFTA to Congress for ratification while it bullies Central American governments into withdrawing policies it disagrees with. The Dominican Republic has already repealed a tax on soft drinks containing imported corn syrup, and Guatemala's president has promised to reverse legislation facilitating local production of low-cost generic drugs instead of buying them from U.S. drug makers.

If passed, the agreement will eliminate duties on most U.S. exports to the region and make it easier for Central American textile and apparel producers to sell to the United States. CAFTA's other members are Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. The pact faces fierce opposition from U.S. labor and environmental groups, but the Bush administration believes enough Democrats will vote for the deal to gain ratification by May. "[CAFTA] will be the toughest trade vote of the year, and we want it to be the first trade vote of the year," said National Association of Manufacturers vice president Franklin Vargo.

Falling pay narrows wage gap

For decades, feminists have complained about the gender gap – the massive disparity between the wages men and women receive. By the late 1990s the average female worker was paid just 76 cents for every dollar paid to the average male employee. (The disparity is much worse if you calculate lifetime earnings, as women are disproportionately pushed into lower-paid part-time labor and must take more time off to deal with child rearing and other family obligations.)

However, under the Bush administration the gap has shrunk to 81 percent – the smallest disparity ever recorded.

How did they do it? By driving down wages for men. Over the past four years, men's average wages have consistently lagged behind inflation (a few have done much better, most have done worse), while those women who held on to their jobs have been more or less holding their ground.

Because male workers have historically been concentrated in better-paid manufacturing jobs, they are more vulnerable than women to layoffs and more likely to be forced to accept lower wages when they find a new job. Meanwhile, growing numbers of college-educated women are finding jobs in better-paying administrative and professional jobs. While these women tend to earn less than their male counterparts, they still pull up the averages.

Judges back firing of barkeep who won't wear makeup

A U.S. federal appeals court has ruled that it was not illegal to fire a female bartender who refused to wear makeup at a Reno, Nevada, casino. Darlene Jespersen had worked for nearly 20 years at a Harrah's casino bar before the company revised its policy to require female bartenders to wear makeup. When she was fired despite otherwise excellent performance reviews, she filed suit alleging sex discrimination.

A three-judge panel (all men) ruled that the policy was comparable to one requiring male employees to have short hair, and so was not discriminatory.

In a dissenting opinion, Judge Sidney Thomas said: "Harrah's fired Jespersen because of her failure to conform to sex stereotypes, which is discrimination based on sex ... The distinction created by the majority opinion leaves men and women in services industries, who are more likely to be subject to policies like the Harrah's 'Personal Best' policy, without the protection that white-collar professionals receive."

"Living" in New York City

A new study by the United Way of New York City and the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement concludes that a family of four needs $51,000 to live in the Bronx, and even more in other boroughs.

According to federal poverty guidelines, a family of four must earn $18,850 to avoid being classified as poor. But that amount won't go far in New York.

The new study is part of a series of "self-sufficiency" studies examining the true cost of maintaining a decent standard of living (adequate living quarters, medical and child care, etc., but not luxuries or entertainment). It found that the cost of housing alone has risen 40 percent in the past four years, and the average family with young children is spending more than half their income on rent.

Even so, many New Yorkers are forced to live in tiny one-room apartments, eat out of soup kitchens, or commute long distances because they cannot afford to live in the city where they work. Even by federal poverty guidelines, more than a third of New York residents are considered "working poor."

Living Wage Law upheld

The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a challenge to Berkeley's Living Wage Ordinance. Berkeley's law has much broader coverage than most such ordinances, requiring that city vendors, contractors, lessees and Marina businesses that employ more than six people pay workers at least $10.75 an hour (or $12.55 an hour if health benefits aren't included).

The challenge was brought by a Berkeley (Calif.) Marina restaurant which claimed the law unconstitutionally modified its 50-year lease with the city.

Job cuts top 1 million for fourth straight year

The number of job cuts by U.S. employers in 2004 topped the 1 million mark for the fourth straight year, outplacement firm Challenger Gray & Christmas said Jan. 5.

Firms announced 109,045 job cuts in December, the fourth straight month of more than 100,000 job cuts.

Grocery workers taking a beating

San Francisco-area grocery workers were working without a contract as the IW went to press, after grocery chains refused a third contract extension. Eight UFCW locals representing 30,000 Safeway, Albertsons and Kroger workers had requested another two-week contract extension but were turned down the same day a Northern California UFCW local ratified a contract containing deep concessions.

Desperate to avoid a repeat of the Southern California strike and lockout, the UFCW has offered more than $100 million in concessions on health care, including doubling copays, but is trying to hold the line against lower wages or benefits for new hires and to protect retirees' health benefits.

San Francisco workers fear they will be asked to agree to concessions similar to those contained in the new contract covering more than 17,000 grocery workers from Sacramento up to the California-Oregon border.

Unlike other recent UFCW agreements, the contract does not set a lower pay scale for new hires, instead reducing some wages across the board, stretching out the hours new employees must work before reaching the top of the wage scale from the previous 2,080 to 7,800 hours, and allowing the grocery chains to buy out high-seniority workers. And while the contract does not require workers to pay monthly premiums, it sharply increases medical copayments and requires workers to pay as much as $1,800 of medical bills out of pocket before their coverage kicks in. Retirees will pay $70 a month to keep their health benefits, which had previously been free.

In addition, new workers must work six months to become eligible for health coverage, an additional 19 months for their family to become eligible, and a total of 61/2 years to reach the top health care plan.

"They doubled our prescriptions, they doubled our doctor visits," said a Raley's meat cutter who voted against the contract. "They want to take away, take away, take away."

Workers could see health benefits further eroded during the life of the contract. The contract cuts the amount employers pay for health coverage from the current $6.16 per hour per employee to $5.51. If costs increase more than 30 percent during the three-year contract – they have been rising much more quickly in recent years – union members would have to cover the difference.

Other changes include a reduction in the hourly premium paid for working Sundays and a provision allowing stores to introduce self-service checkout stands.

On the positive side, workers would receive a 25-cent hourly raise and lump-sum bonuses over the contract's 33 months. They will not receive cost of living increases.

While industry analysts said the contract was a major step toward making unionized grocery workers "competitive" with workers in the nonunion sector, the UFCW characterized the deal as, to quote spokesman Ron Lind, "the best settlement ... in the nation." "It's remarkably better than what came out of Southern California," he added, though officially the UFCW still insists it won that fight.

Safeway clerk Patricia Moore put it slightly differently, telling the *Sacramento Bee*, "It looks to me, I swear, that this (agreement) was typed up by Safeway. ... It's just unbelievable."

Meanwhile Colorado grocery workers continue working without a contract since the UFCW international stepped forward to block a strike vote last year. A federal mediator has stepped into negotiations with Kroger-owned stores; Albertson's and Safeway have rejected mediation.

UFCW Local 7 represents 23,000 grocery workers in Colorado and Wyoming.

The UFCW is also beginning negotiations in St. Paul, Minnesota, with newspaper reports saying the union has proposed cuts to workers' health care coverage.

Although the union had claimed it had learned its lesson after the Southern California debacle, and would wage coordinated campaigns to increase its leverage at the bargaining table, in fact each bargaining unit has taken on the chains alone, while their fellow union members across the country worked – often without contracts – to keep the profits rolling in.

Second Quebec Wal-Mart goes union

Workers at a Wal-Mart in Saint-Hyacinthe have been granted union recognition by the Quebec Labour Relations Commission, which found that a majority had signed union authorization cards with the UFCW. It is the UFCW's second organizing win at Wal-Mart; the union is currently negotiating for workers at a Wal-Mart in Jonquiere, Quebec, where the company has threatened to close the store if the union was not "reasonable."

Spokesman Andrew Pelletier said Wal-Mart would likely challenge the union victory in court as "undemocratic," because the company was not allowed an election period in which to attempt to intimidate workers and undermine the union majority. Wal-Mart is seeking changes to provincial labor law to bar recognition based on authorization cards.

Meanwhile, Wal-Mart issued a flurry of press releases and full-page advertisements in January responding to widespread criticism of the retail giant's labor practices. The ads claim that the average pay of a Wal-Mart "associate" is $9.68 an hour, plus benefits, and point to the company's policy of selecting management from the ranks of its workers. (Several low-level managers have recently filed suit, arguing that they have been forced to put in long hours of unpaid overtime in order to keep those jobs.)

Wal-Mart said the campaign was prompted by union campaigns against the company, including a proposal being considered by the AFL-CIO to devote $25 million to organize its workers. While Wal-Mart says all its workers make well above minimum wage, a class action suit has been filed by several janitors who cleaned Wal-Mart stores alleging minimum wage and overtime pay violations.

It can be difficult to calculate the relative labor costs of Wal-Mart and its competitors. Wages in the retail sector vary widely, from minimum wage to $20 an hour or more for some veteran workers. After years of concessions in many markets, unionized grocery workers often earn little more than minimum wage to start, but they are still typically covered by health care plans that charge no deductible for individual coverage (and often for families) – plans that can cost nearly as much as the workers' hourly wages, and which have been a major target in recent contract disputes.

Non-union retailers typically offer much more limited health plans, and require substantial out-of-pocket premiums from participating workers. As a result, many workers can not afford to participate, helping to keep plan costs down.

Federal panel imposes filing fee on rail worker grievances

The National Mediation Board, a labor relations agency whose members are named by President Bush, has voted to impose filing fees of up to $300 for all grievances filed by rail workers. Railroads will not be charged the fee, nor will unions be reimbursed for grievances that they win.

Under a 1925 federal law unique to rail and airline unions, grievances that can't be resolved through negotiations are submitted to NMB arbitration. That law also curbs the unions' right to strike.

The Board is evidently trying to stop workers and unions from holding railroads accountable for contract violations by making it too expensive to press most grievances.

Labor needs a radical vision

BY DAVID BACON, ILCA

For forty years, AFL-CIO leaders George Meany and Lane Kirkland saw unorganized workers as a threat when they saw them at all. They drove left-wing activists out of unions, and threw the message of solidarity on the scrap heap. Labor's dinosaurs treated unions as a business, representing members in exchange for dues, while ignoring the needs of workers as a whole. A decade ago new leaders were thrust into office in the AFL-CIO – a product of the crisis of falling union density, weakened political power, and a generation of angry labor activists demanding a change in direction. Those ten years have yielded important gains for unions. Big efforts were made to organize – strawberry workers in Watsonville, asbestos workers in New York and New Jersey, poultry and meatpacking workers in the south, and healthcare workers throughout the country. Yet in only one year was the pace of organizing fast enough to keep union density (the proportion of the total U.S. work force who are members of unions) from falling.

Other gains were made in winning more progressive policies on immigration, and in some areas, relations with workers in other countries. Yet here also, progress has not been fast enough. Corporations and the government policies that serve them have presented new dangers even greater than those faced a decade ago. The set of proposals made by SEIU, and now by other unions from CWA to the Teamsters, are a positive response to this crisis. They've started a debate labor desperately needs. And they all put the issue of stopping the slide in members and power – the problem of organizing – on center stage where it belongs. Organizing large numbers of workers will not just help unions. Wages rise under the pressure of union drives, especially among non-union workers. Stronger unions will force politicians to recognize universal health care, secure jobs, and free education after high school, not as pie-in-the-sky dreams, but as the legitimate demands of millions of people.

But the AFL-CIO has a huge job. Raising the percentage of organized workers in the U.S. from just 10 to 11 percent would mean organizing over a million people. Only a social movement can organize people on this scale. In addition to examining structural reforms that can make unions more effective and concentrate their power, the labor movement needs a program which can inspire people to organize on their own, one which is unafraid to put forward radical demands, and rejects the constant argument that any proposal that can't get through Congress next year is not worth fighting for.

As much as people need a raise, the promise of one is not enough to inspire them to face the certain dangers they know too well await them. Working families need the promise of a better world. Over and over, for more than a century, workers have shown that they will struggle for the future of their children and their communities, even when their own future seems in doubt. But only a new, radical social vision can inspire the wave of commitment, idealism and activity necessary to rebuild the labor movement.

Fire a worker, go to jail

Organizing a union is a right, but it only exists on paper. Violating a worker's right to organize should be punished with the same severity used to protect property rights. Fire a worker for joining a union – go to jail.

Today, instead, workers get fired in a third of all organizing drives. Companies close and abandon whole communities, and threaten to do so even more often. Strikebreaking and union busting have become acceptable corporate behavior. There are no effective penalties for companies that violate labor rights, and most workers know this. In addition, there are new weapons, like modern-day company unions, in the anti-union arsenal. Chronic unemployment, and social policies like welfare reform, pit workers against each other in vicious competition, undermining the unity they need to organize.

Millions of workers are desperate because they have lost jobs, or are in danger of losing them. Employers move factories, and downsize their workforce to boost stock prices. The government cuts social benefits while driving welfare recipients into a job market already glutted with millions of people who can't find work.

Without speaking directly to workers' desperation and fear of unemployment, unions will never convince millions to organize, and risk the jobs they still have. Government and corporations may treat a job as a privilege, and a vanishing one at that, but unions must defend a job as a right. And to protect that right, workers need laws which prohibit capital flight, and which give them a large amount of control over corporate investment. In the meantime, organizing unemployed people should be as important as organizing in the workplace.

Since grinding poverty in much of the world is an incentive for moving production, defending the standard of living of workers around the world is as necessary as defending our own. The logic of inclusion in a global labor movement must apply as much to a worker in Bangladesh as it does to the non-union worker down the street.

While the percentage of organized workers has declined every year for the past decade, unions have made important progress in finding alternative strategic ideas to the old business unionism of Meany and Kirkland. If these ideas are developed and extended, they provide an important base for making unions stronger and embedding them more deeply in working-class communities.

The two proposals at the end of SEIU's ten points begin to address these strategic ideas, but they fall short of providing a new direction. They are the proposals on diversity, or civil rights, and on building a global labor movement.

Defend immigrant workers

Labor's change in immigration policy was a watershed development, which put unions on the side of immigrants, rather than against them. The change provided the basis for an alliance between labor and immigrant communities based on mutual interest, and asked union members, and workers in general, to fight for a society based on inclusion, rather than exclusion. But this policy was usually implemented to win support for union organizing campaigns, and only rarely to defend immigrant communities as they were attacked in the post-911 hysteria.

When 40,000 airport screeners lost their jobs because of their citizenship status, there was hardly any labor outcry or protest. For unions who want workers outside their ranks to feel they represent their interests, this was a terrible mistake. But it was compounded when Bush banned union representation for the new screener workforce. Once again, an attack on the rights of immigrants led to attacks on the rights of workers generally – a move which called for mass opposition and was met instead with more silence.

Labor needs an outspoken policy that defends the civil rights of all sections of U.S. society, and is willing to take on the government in an open fight to protect them. If the war on terror scares labor into silence, few workers will feel confident in risking their jobs (and freedom) to join unions. Yet people far beyond unions will defend labor rights if they are part of a broader civil rights agenda, and if the labor movement is willing to go to bat with community organizations for it.

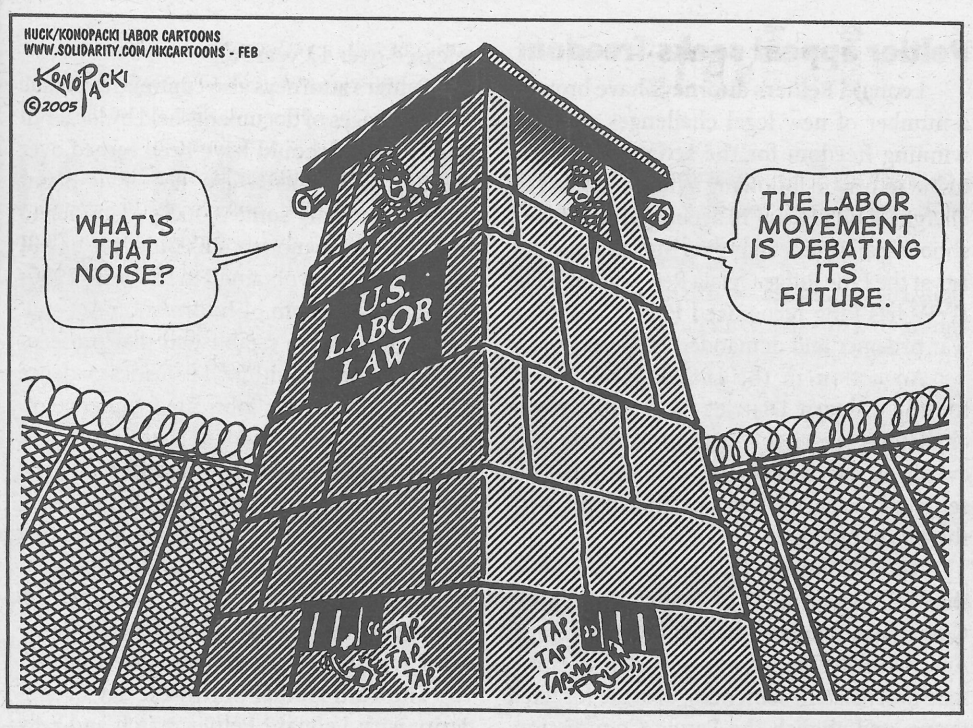
Political calculations in Washington



Labor revamp debate: Politics or labor media?

AFL-CIO affiliates continue floating plans for revamping the federation. The American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees says the AFL should put more resources into politics, building a "permanent volunteer army" of union members to campaign in the 2006 elections, and dedicating a substantial part of unions' AFL affiliation fees to political action.

Meanwhile, the Machinists adopted a report concluding that the AFL is in pretty good shape. "We believe the current fight for control of the AFL-CIO is a waste of time, energy and resources." However, the IAM does recommend investing $200 million "to create a labor-owned cable network that projects a positive image of union members and the American labor movement."



shouldn't be the guide to labor's policy on immigration and civil rights. Workers need a movement that fights for what they really need, not what lobbyists say a Republican administration and Congress will accept. The position won at the AFL-CIO's Los Angeles convention – calling for immigration amnesty, the repeal of employer sanctions, and a halt to corporate guest worker proposals – has yet to be achieved in real life.

A new direction on civil rights requires linking immigrant rights to a real jobs program and full employment economy. It demands affirmative action that can come to grips with the devastation in communities of color, especially African American communities. Some unions, particularly HERE, have moved from rhetoric to actual contract proposals linking immigrant rights and jobs for underrepresented communities. But this is just a step towards unity, and it is already endangered by proposals for new guest worker programs that will pit immigrants against the unemployed. As employer lobbyists continually point out, jobs and immigration are tied together. Corporations will either pit people against each other at the bottom of the workforce, or labor will unite them in a struggle for their mutual interest.

International solidarity

When Tom Donahue and the old Kirkland administration were defeated in 1995, activists on all levels of the labor movement expected that the AFL-CIO would take down the cold war barriers. Labor's cold war foreign policy separated US unions from workers around the world, and often betrayed them in the interest of US foreign policy.

The demand to change this policy was partly driven by the impact of NAFTA on the consciousness of millions of U.S. workers. For the first time in decades, pressure came from below, from local unions and rank-and-filers, demanding that the labor movement seek alliances with workers abroad based on common interest. In an era when the fate of millions of U.S. workers is tied to the international system of production and markets, this is a survival question. A growing number of workers, both inside and outside unions, today understand that an effective response to globalization will affect their own welfare. For the first time since the 1940s, millions of U.S. workers can be, and have been, drawn into the fight against the global free market economy, from Seattle to Miami.

The neoliberal policies imposed by the U.S. and other wealthy countries attack living standards, workers' rights and the public sector everywhere. Increasingly, they are imposed at the point of a gun, using the war on terror as a pretext to suppress opposition. The U.S. labor movement should be, and can be, the most outspoken advocate for peace, since eroded standards and privatization are used to attract corporate investment, and the further export of jobs and production.

Instead, after expressing doubts before the invasion of Iraq, the AFL-CIO stood silent once it began. Some unions made opposition to the war part of their election campaign, but the official AFL-CIO apparatus accepted the false logic that speaking out on the war was the "kiss of death." The opposite proved true. Some 10.5 million voters from union households said the war was the most important issue to them. To the 51 percent who voted for Kerry, the campaign had nothing to say. And for the 49% who voted for Bush – families with children in the service, or reservists, or honest people affected by national security hysteria – no effort was made to convince them that the war was as bad for working families at home as it was for the Iraqis whose country is being destroyed. Silence on the war had a high price.

The AFL-CIO needs a program that opposes implementation of neoliberal policies internationally, taking a consistent approach from Mexico to China, from Baghdad to Bogotá. Moving away from the cold war past was a watershed development as important as the change on immigration, and related to it. But change in the labor movement's international activity has been incomplete.

A new direction in international relations should be based on solidarity, and solidarity is a two-way street. The end of labor's cold war policy has to be made explicit, as part of finding a new set of principles for our relations with unions and workers in other countries. While some of those principles are embodied in ILO labor standards calling for the right to organize, an end to child labor, and other protections, unions in developing countries increasingly demand a broader agenda. In particular they want greater help in defending the public sector under attack from privatization, and an international system for defending the rights of migrants. New international relationships need to be based on U.S. unions listening to the concerns of labor in the developing world, not just imposing its own agenda, however well intentioned.

A new, more radical political program runs counter to the prevailing wisdom of our times, which holds the profit motive sacred, and believes that market forces solve all social problems. If labor's leaders move in this direction, they won't get invited for coffee with the president or included in meetings of the Democratic Leadership Council. At the beginning of the cold war, the AFL-CIO built its headquarters right down the street from the White House, eloquent testimony to the desire of its old leaders for respectability in the eyes of the political elite. That dream may be difficult for some to give up. But labor can't speak convincingly to the working poor without, at the same time, directly opposing the common economic understanding shared by Republicans and many Democrats. The labor movement needs political independence.

A social vision

To organize by the millions, workers have to make hard decisions, putting their jobs on the line for the sake of their future. Unions of past decades won the loyalty of working people when joining one was even more dangerous and illegal than it is today. The left in labor then proposed an alternative social vision – that society could be organized to ensure social and economic justice for all people. While some workers believed that change could be made within the capitalist system, and others argued for replacing it, they were united by the idea that working people could build enough political power to end poverty, unemployment, racism and discrimination.

The poor will not be always with us, they declared. Today our biggest problem is finding similar ways for unions to affect workers' consciousness – the way people think. A new commitment to organizing can't be simply a matter of more money and organizers, or more intelligent and innovative tactics, or structural change, as necessary as these things are. During the periods in our history when unions grew by qualitative leaps, their activity relied on workers organizing themselves, not just acting as troops in campaigns masterminded by paid staff.

For workers to act in this way today, they would have to have a much clearer sense of their own interests, and a vision that large-scale social change is possible. Does the labor movement present such a vision of a more just society, capable of inspiring workers to struggle and sacrifice? Labor's radical vision of decades ago made it a stronger movement. Losing it in the red scares of the 1950s deprived most unions of their ability to inspire. It's no accident that the years of McCarthyism marked the point when the percentage of union members began to decline.

Our history should tell us that radical ideas have always had a transformative power, especially the idea that while you might not live to see a new world, your children might, if you fought for it. In the 1930s and '40s, these ideas were propagated within unions by leftwing political organizations. A general radical culture reinforced them. Today most unions no longer have this left presence. Can the labor movement itself fulfill this role?

At the very least, unions need a large core of activists at all levels who are unafraid of radical ideas of social justice, and who can link them to immediate bread-and-butter issues. And since good ideas are worthless unless they reach people, the labor movement has to be able to communicate that vision to workers outside its own ranks. In an era when many unions have discontinued their own publications, or turned them into ones light on content, they need exactly the opposite.

This is a very important moment, in which a national debate and discussion can have real consequences for the future. It can provide a powerful impetus to organizing an anti-Bush coalition in the short term, and a more profound political realignment in the longer term.

The present period is not unlike the 1920s, which were also filled with company unions, the violence of strikebreakers, and a lack of legal rights for workers. A decade later, those obstacles were swept away. An upsurge of millions in the 1930s, radicalized by the depression and leftwing activism, forced corporate acceptance of labor for the first time in the country's history. The current changes taking place in U.S. unions may be the beginning of something as large and profound. If they are, then the obstacles unions face today can become historical relics as quickly as did those of an earlier era.

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Harvest workers at the Durst Hop Ranch, August 1913

The IWW: 1905 - 2005

BY WILLIAM LEFEVRE

Ninety-two years ago, in the summer of 1913, workers from the West Coast descended on the Durst Hop Ranch in Wheatland, California. Lured by promises of good work and high wages, almost 3,000 men, women and children had arrived at what was the largest farm in California in preparation for the August hop harvest.

Far from ideal from the start, conditions for the workers at the farm deteriorated quickly. Workers found that Durst had advertised for far more workers than he could use, that there was no housing, and that the land Durst rented for encampment had no running water and insufficient sanitation facilities. Durst controlled the flow of supplies into the camp at inflated prices and provided an acidic "lemonade" for workers for an elevated price. Worse, yet, Durst daily changed what he would pay the workers and kept back 10% of the pay as an end-of-harvest bonus. Durst decided, himself, who would last.

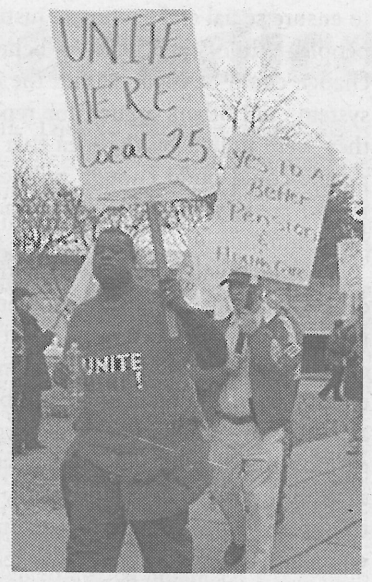
At the start of August, under temperatures that were above 100 degrees, Wobbly harvest workers began to agitate to demand changes in the living conditions and improved wages. On August 3, Blackie Ford was speaking at an IWW mass meeting in the camp when Durst, the Yuba County district attorney, and the local sheriff and his deputies arrived. Attempting to break up the previously peaceful crowd and arrest Ford, one of the deputies fired his shotgun. In the ensuing panic, the district attorney, a deputy sheriff, and two hop workers were killed. Scores of workers were injured.

Following the incident, Yuba County authorities requested National Guard units from the state. In the following weeks, hundreds of workers were rounded up and jailed. After a massive manhunt, Ford and fellow worker Herman Suhr were arrested and charged with the murder of the district attorney. Both were convicted and handed life sentences. After the Durst Ranch incident, the IWW became the largest organizer among the predominantly migrant California agricultural workers

By 1918, federal efforts were underway to suppress the IWW that would lead to the enactment of criminal syndicalism laws and the government seizure of IWW records and assets. Trials ensued, and many of the most prominent IWW leaders and organizers were imprisoned. The assets and records seized by the government were never returned, leading to a scarcity of IWW historical records.

Most remaining IWW historical records are contained in the IWW Collection and other related collections at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Anyone interested in the collection, or in adding to it, should contact William LeFevre at the Archives at telephone number 313-577-2789 or by email at William.LeFevre@Wayne.Edu.

Hotel union abandons national bargaining bid



Washington, D.C., hotel workers reached a new contract with 14 downtown hotels Jan. 14, one day before a threatened strike on the eve of the presidential inauguration. Some 3,200 maids, bellhops, cooks, servers and other workers at Washington's top hotels had been working without a contract for months.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco UNITE HERE Local 2 says it still prefers a two-year contract in order to align union contract expirations across the country, but would accept a longer agreement in exchange for pay hikes and preservation of health care benefits for workers, their families, and retirees. The hotels are demanding that workers pick up any cost increases beyond 10 or 12 percent a year.

As we go to press, hotel workers are working under a "cooling-off period" that ends Jan. 23. It is not clear if the hotels will lock workers out once again if a contract is not reached by then, now that the busy holiday season is over. The union has already announced it would not strike before March at the earliest. Hotel management, on the other hand, has insisted the union must agree to its terms by the 23rd.

The union has nor backed down on its demand that the hotels continue "card-check neutrality," which obligates the hotels to recognize the union once it secures majority support on union authorization cards. In the 15 years this has been in place, the union has used the procedure to increase the share of San Francisco hotel workers it represents from 74 to 88 percent.

The union had kicked off its last round of bargaining announcing its firm commitment to secure two-year contracts so that agreements in most major cities would expire within months of each other, increasing workers' bargaining power against the national chains that now dominate the industry. That commitment has now been completely abandoned, in exchange for standstill agreements in which workers receive modest pay increases (and sometimes no pay hike) but hold on to their existing health and other benefit packages.

UAW signs 3-tier deal with Caterpillar

United Auto Workers members have approved a six-year contract with heavy equipment giant Caterpillar Inc. The deal covers some 9,000 workers, and follows a six and a half year standoff with two failed strikes that preceded their last contract in 1998.

The UAW says the new contract will preserve jobs that Caterpillar threatened to move to nonunion plants. However, the company reserves the right to close its Memphis distribution center.

Workers will be required to pay into their health plans for the first time, and give up annual productivity and vacation bonuses. Retirees will also have to pay for health benefits, violating company promises to provide their coverage. And the contract creates three wage scales: current employees will retain current pay levels, while current temporary workers who are converted to full-time status will work for $3 to $5 less per hour. Future hires will be paid as little as $10 an hour, compared to the current $20 starting pay.

UAW President Ron Gettelfinger called the deal "the best possible contract under very difficult circumstances." Caterpillar earned record profits last year, and paid multi-million dollar bonuses to its executives.

One member called the vote a no-win proposition. "If you vote yes, you screw yourself and if you vote no, you screw yourself," he said before the contract vote. "If this passes, Caterpillar should offer the union a closet in the new museum because that's all they'll need for union meetings."

Caterpillar donated $20 million for a riverfront museum even as it insisted on the concessions at the bargaining table.

Union workers still do better

Although unions are under fierce attack across the United States, the average union member still holds onto substantially better workplace benefits than their nonunion counterparts according to data compiled by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Union workers are more likely to have health insurance, paid holidays and vacations, and pension plans. Not only are union workers more likely to have more benefits, they're more likely to have better benefits too. Union members generally pay less for health coverage than nonunion workers.

Union workers are also more likely to have dental and vision coverage, paid life insurance, short-term disability coverage, and other benefits. The government doesn't track other benefits, ranging from scheduling rights to protections against forced overtime or unjust firings.

Only 50 percent of nonunion U.S. workers had health insurance in 2004, but 81 percent of union workers had coverage – a gap that grew by 5 percentage points over the last four years. And union members pay lower premiums for insurance. For single coverage, 43 percent of union workers pay no monthly premium at all; only 21 percent of nonunion workers can say the same thing. When they do pay premiums, union workers typically pay 11 percent of the cost, about half the 20 percent that nonunion workers must pay.

For family coverage, 33 percent of union workers pay no monthly premiums, compared with only 7 percent of nonunion workers. When they do pay premiums, union workers typically pay 17 percent of the cost – half of the 33 percent that nonunion workers must pay. Union workers also enjoy better pension plans and more time off for vacations and holidays.

Janitors seek transition rights

Massachusetts state legislators introduced legislation Jan. 6 that would require firms that change ownership to retain janitors under contract with their present cleaning companies for at least 90 days. The hope is to shield janitors from sudden firings and loss of benefits when new owners seek contracts with other cleaning companies.

Fifty janitors at Providence (Rhode Island) College have succeeded in keeping their jobs after the college contracted its janitorial work to a different company. The work was picked up by another unionized contractor, which agreed to keep the existing workforce (though it required them to reapply for their jobs and submit to drug tests) after a campaign by local unions. The college refused requests to require bidders to keep the workers or negotiate with the union.

Alice Lynd free on appeal

The Fourth District Court of Appeals stayed a judge's order sentencing Alice Lynd to prison because she refused to testify about a conversation she had with an inmate in the Lucasville, Ohio, prison about events during the 1993 Lucasville uprising (see report last issue). The Dec. 21 appeals court ruling notes that Lynd "has made a good faith claim of confidentiality" and so suspended the contempt decree while her appeal is pending.

Peltier appeal seeks freedom

Leonard Peltier's attorneys have brought a number of new legal challenges aimed at winning freedom for the activist sentenced to life in prison following a frame-up trial on charges of killing an FBI agent (part of a group shooting at American Indian Movement activists at the Pine Ridge Oglala Reservation). The IWW has long recognized Peltier as a class war prisoner and demanded his release.

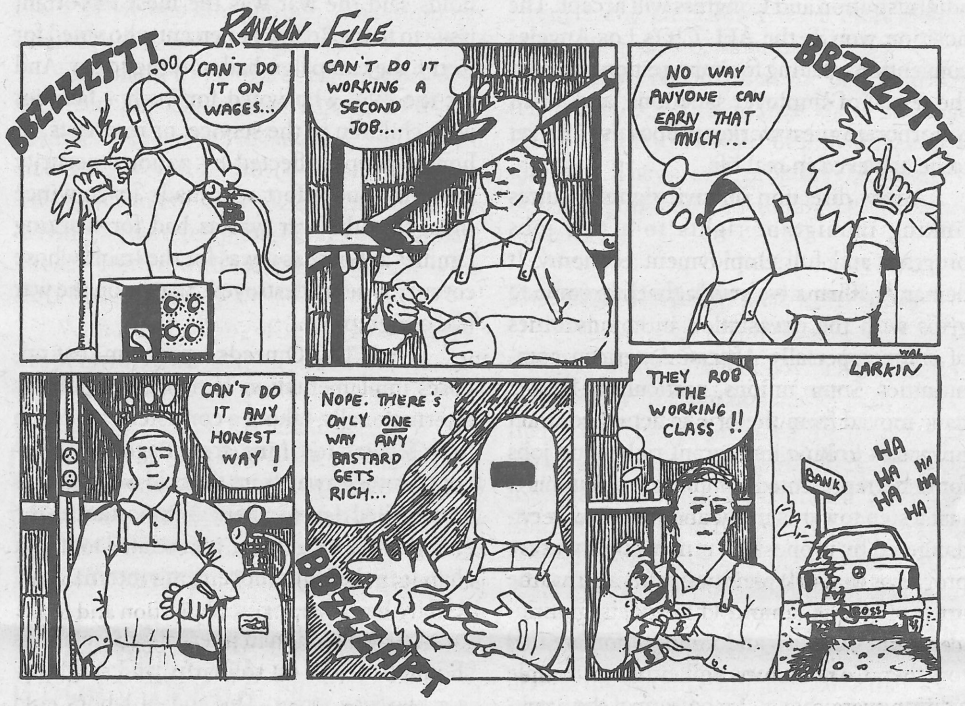
An action in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Dakota challenges the trial court's jurisdiction over events on the reservation, and notes that the sentence imposed was not consistent with the jury's findings.

Another lawsuit charges that officials of the U.S. Department of Justice and Parole Commission violated the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. The Act was intended to eliminate inconsistent sentences, provide for fixed terms, and abolish the Parole Commission. However, the Commission has remained in existence, and has refused to set a release date for Peltier and other prisoners. Under the law's provisions, Peltier should have been released over 12 years ago.

Peltier's attorneys also continue to pursue 140,000 pages of documents held by local FBI offices which should have been turned over during pretrial discovery. The government turned over only some 3,500 pages prior to the 1977 trial; another 12,000 pages of FBI documents were obtained in the early 1980s through a Freedom of Information Act suit. Those documents established that prosecutors intentionally withheld ballistics evidence which undercut the fabricated evidence offered by the government at trial.

Documents already obtained suggest that the government infiltrated Peltier's legal defense team. The government claims that release of more documents could compromise national security and the so-called war on "transnational terrorism," and strain diplomatic relations with a foreign government.

The 12th annual northwest day of solidarity with Leonard Peltier march and rally will be held in Tacoma, Washington, Saturday, February 5, beginning at noon at Portland Avenue Park, followed by a rally at the U.S. Federal Court House, 1717 Pacific Ave.



Seafarers' libel suit against union dissident dismissed

A libel lawsuit filed by the Seafarers International Union against retired member Robert Swanson and the Seamen's Justice Center has been dismissed by a federal court. This is the third time the suit, which charged Swanson with libeling union officials on a website (www.seajustice.org) he maintains for SIU dissidents, has been dismissed by federal and state courts on procedural grounds.

This time the suit was dismissed because it was improperly filed in federal court – the court ruled that since the SIU has members in Iowa, Iowa courts are the proper venue for any legal action.

The lawsuit charged that Swanson negligently published material on the seajustice web site that defamed the union and its top officials and sought an injunction barring him from even mentioning the union or its attorneys. Swanson is now trying to raise $2,000 to pay legal bills he incurred fighting this frivolous lawsuit.

The SIU also failed in efforts to dismiss a lawsuit challenging its refusal to admit older workers into its apprenticeship program. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission brought an age discrimination suit on behalf of more than 120 seamen barred from the program. The 4th Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld the EEOC's determination that this constitutes unlawful discrimination, allowing the case to proceed to trial.

Steelworkers, Pace to merge

Two of North America's largest industrial unions have agreed to merge, creating an 850,000-member union if delegates approve the agreement in April.

The merger of the Steelworkers and the Paper, Allied Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (itself the product of a series of mergers) is the latest and largest of several in recent years. The new union would be known as the United Steel, Paper & Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW), and be headed by Steelworkers president Leo Gerard.

While the union would be concentrated in manufacturing sectors, it will also include printers, bus drivers, public utility and health care and other service workers.

Satellite spying on truckers

Growing numbers of trucking companies are using GPS satellite systems to spy on drivers – monitoring their speed, breaks, and routes. Among companies adding the systems is UPS, which claims it will use the system not to monitor workers, but to alert them when they're at the wrong address.

Increasingly, workers are expected to use GPS-equipped systems to clock in away from the office, and log the time spent and activities performed at each stop along the way – and even to set up zones workers are forbidden to enter (such as particular bars, or union offices). And while bosses say they turn the systems off when workers are on the clock, there is no way to enforce that.

Some employers require workers to carry GPS-equipped cell phones at all times, even when they're off work.

Teamsters scab in news strike

Teamsters Local 473 members are crossing picket lines at the *Youngstown Vindicator,* abandoning Newspaper Guild members fighting to preserve health benefits. Teamsters had worked for 14 months without a contract before joining the Guild in striking Nov. 16.

The Guild's support gave the Teamsters (24 mailers) the leverage to reach a contract (albeit one with concessions on health care and staffing), and leave newsroom and circulation workers out in the cold.

"We had to take our best interests to heart," chief steward Mike Ross explained.

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IWW truckers' fight draws attention

Our fight to end the exploitation of short-haul truckers continues to gain ground and is drawing attention from many quarters. The following is excerpted from a lengthy featured article in the January 13 *Sacramento News & Review:*

On a fog-soaked December morning, near an Interstate 5 offramp on the outskirts of Stockton, about a dozen men huddled in a loose circle. Some wore the traditional long beards and Sikh turbans of their native India. The younger men were mostly clean-shaven and sported brand-name windbreakers. To the north was a truck dealership. To the south, shrouded in the fog, was a dog-food factory.

The men spoke animatedly in Punjabi and then broke up, shuffling around the empty lot, talking on cell phones and killing time. Occasionally, a taller man would call them together again for another meeting.

This is what a wildcat truckers strike looks like in the Stockton Valley.

These were independent, short-haul truckers, mostly recent immigrants from India. Although they own their own trucks and technically are self-employed, these drivers usually contract exclusively with one company and depend on that company for all of their work. In this case, the company is Kach Transportation.

But, for three days in December, none of these drivers hauling for Kach went to work. And the company couldn't move goods from the area rail yards to the stores and warehouses in the surrounding communities, like Stockton, Sacramento, Modesto, Woodland and points in between.

There were no angry chants or workers marching around with picket signs. No fiery speeches... Just a bunch of fed-up truckers not going to work. And yet these men are part of a unique labor tradition dating back a century.

The only real clues linking them to the tradition were a few signs bearing a slogan from a bygone era – "An injury to one is an injury to all" – planted in the wet ground around the perimeter of the lot.

"The company, they won't talk to us at all," the tall man explained. "We said, 'Come talk to us. You know, we might let go of a few things, you let go of a few things, and it will work out.' But they just said no."

Like most of the Kach drivers, he asked *SN&R* not to print his name, fearing he would be singled out by employers and not be able to find work. ... The Kach drivers went on strike December 14, demanding more pay for rising fuel costs and an end to onerous "wait times," during which the drivers must remain idle without pay while their trucks are loaded or unloaded. It was a small strike but the latest in a string of labor actions by short-haul truckers in the last year.

The Stockton drivers claim they sparked a wave of independent-trucker strikes along the West Coast and then across the country in the spring of 2004. "We were the first. Then Oakland, then everywhere," the tall man explained. Truckers as far away as Los Angeles and ultimately Miami and Savannah, Ga., tied up ports and railheads with spontaneous work stoppages.

The drivers, whether in Stockton or Seattle, are an important part of the backbone of the "containerized economy" ferrying goods from ports and rail yards to your local Costco or Wal-Mart, or the myriad warehouses and distributors up and down the West Coast.

"We would not sit with a group of drivers and negotiate... And we certainly wouldn't talk to any union people."

— Patriot boss

The loads they haul could be just about any dry goods, from laundry detergent to toilet paper to children's toys. One load, from Stockton to Sacramento might net a driver $120. The truckers pay for their own insurance, gas and vehicle maintenance. Often they are still making payments on their rigs.

By and large, they don't belong to unions. Or, at least, not the unions you'd expect.

Over the summer, the Kach drivers, and the vast majority of short-haul truckers in the Stockton Valley, joined the Industrial Workers of the World, also known as the Wobblies. The union says it has signed up around 220 of the 350 or so independent truckers working in the area.

Not bad for a union that was considered extinct 10 years ago.

The IWW was founded 100 years ago in 1905. In the 1910s and 1920s, the Wobblies were a fearsome presence in the American labor movement, representing radical unionism in its most militant and subversive form. It stood for anti-capitalist revolution and took as its motto "A world without bosses."

Most of the Sikh truck drivers don't consider themselves radicals. But they found the Wobblies were the only union that could, or would, help them. And although trucking companies have refused to recognize their union, the Wobbly truckers have been busy building the union, making demands and sometimes winning concessions.

Companies like Kach do the dispatching, working with brokers and the railroads to arrange pickups and deliveries. The truckers then drive their rigs to the Stockton rail yards – the Union Pacific, Santa Fe or Burlington Northern – pick up their loads and deliver them to stores and warehouses anywhere within 150 miles of Stockton.

The drivers are overwhelmingly Indian, and many are recent immigrants. Drivers said this was partly due to the natural networking that occurs in the local Sikh community, with truckers helping their friends and family members get into the business.

"Mostly, it's Indian drivers, but we've made some inroads into the Latino community," explained Harjit Gill, a Punjabi-speaking Wobbly organizer. "Once we sign [the Latinos] up, we'll have everybody."

It would be a small campaign for a major union like the Teamsters... But to the Wobblies, it's the largest single influx of new members they have seen in several decades. And it's a sign that the IWW gradually is shaking the rust out and becoming something more than an anarchist historical society.

And the Wobblies could become a force to reckon with again. Indeed, in 2001, the nationally known law firm Bullivant Houser Bailey was warning its clients, "Employers should beware, the Wobblies are back."

The Stockton truckers' campaign, combined with a small but steady growth of Wobbly memberships in other communities and a high-profile attempt to unionize Starbucks coffee shops on the East Coast, is getting the IWW attention it hasn't seen in years. For Wobbly organizers, it's a nice way to celebrate turning 100.

But on the fourth day of the Wobblies' Kach strike, it became clear the company wasn't budging.

"They said they would only talk to us individually, not as a group," the tall man explained. Rather than submit to one-on-one meetings with the boss, the Kach truckers decided on a more Wobbly-esque strategy of dealing with an intractable employer: They quit hauling for Kach. ...

Although the Teamsters voiced support for the spring strikes, the powerful trucking union did little actual organizing among the Stockton truck drivers. This is largely because they're independent operators, and federal law doesn't allow them to join unions.

Twenty years ago, these were union jobs, said Chuck Mack, national director of port operations for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. But then came the deregulation movement of the 1980s. Over time, the carrier companies moved away from employing drivers directly and created a system of independent contractors. As a result, the drivers aren't technically employees and no longer have the same rights to negotiate as a union. As working conditions in the trucking industry deteriorated, Mack said, the workforce changed, drawing much more heavily from ethnic minorities and immigrants.

The Teamsters [say they] are working with these truckers, but "you have to be very, very careful, or you might run afoul of anti-trust laws," Mack said. Federal laws like the Sherman Anti-Trust Act prohibit companies from colluding to set prices. That includes independent business owners and contractors. Conceivably, Mack said, a trucking company could sue a union of independent truckers for violating the laws against price fixing.

"It's completely hypocritical," Mack complained. "That law ... was intended to protect workers from the JP Morgans and Rockefellers. Now it's being used against these immigrant workers who are just scraping by."

Enter the IWW, with its historic disdain for any federal law it deems "anti-worker." Gill, then living in Chico, teamed up with Bay Area IWW organizers Bruce Valde and Adam Welch. After being invited by a few Sikh truckers who participated in the spring strikes, the group went to Stockton to look into the possibility of organizing truckers.

Soon they had signed up a majority of the Stockton Valley independent short-haul truckers as members of the IWW. In September, drivers at Patriot Logistics, by then holding IWW union cards, held another strike. They said that company officials had promised them higher pay to make up for increasing gas prices. They also suspected that the company already was collecting higher rates from its customers but wasn't passing the increase on to drivers. "The brokers were paying them, but they weren't giving it to us," said Patriot driver Dewey Obitinalla. "We were each losing about $200 a week." They also sought more pay for that downtime they spent waiting to pick up goods at area rail yards and warehouses.

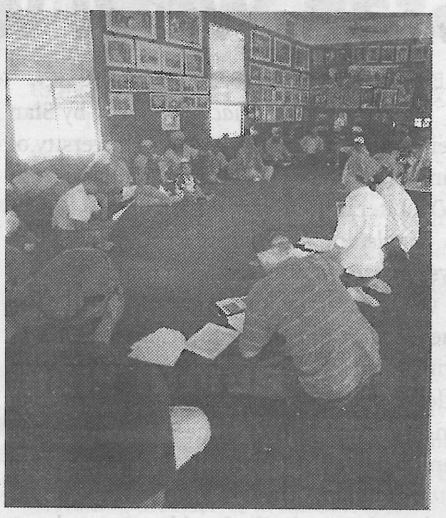


PHOTO: CHARISSE DOMINGO

After staying off the job for three days, the drivers say they won about 80 percent of what they wanted – including a small increase in their basic rates, to cover fuel costs, and an agreement to increase pay for wait times.

The company, however, refuses to acknowledge that any bargaining occurred with the IWW. "It simply didn't happen. We have contracts with individual truck drivers. Those contracts haven't changed and won't change," said Patriot Vice President of Marketing John Tucker from his home in Atlanta, Ga. "We would not sit with a group of drivers and negotiate," Tucker added. "And we certainly wouldn't talk to any union people."

But negotiations did occur, the drivers say. ... Patriot drivers say that, whether the company wants to recognize the union or not, their strike worked.

"It helped. Not a lot, but it helped," said Obitinalla. "This is really the first time I've seen these kinds of demands negotiated. In the five years I've been in this business, my experience is that the managers won't do anything unless they see this kind of unity."...

Just the mention of the name Industrial Workers of the World today evokes memories of the early American labor movement in its most militant, most revolutionary and, in some cases, most terrifying form.

A discussion of IWW history follows...

"The working class and the employing class still have nothing in common," explained the smiling Gill, updating the preamble to the constitution of the IWW, written in Chicago in 1905.

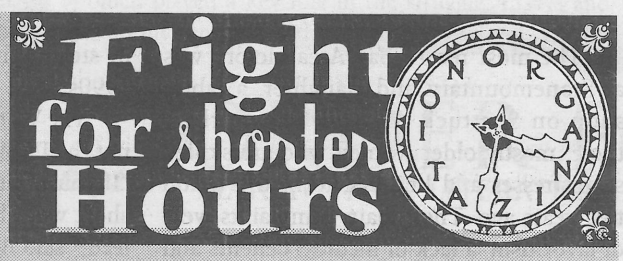
Then, as now, they advocated "anarcho-syndicalism," in which workers themselves seized the means of production – the factory works, the sawmill, the city buses – and determined for themselves how production would be organized and what working conditions would be.

The Wobblies promoted the idea of the "One Big Union," also called industrial unionism. Rather than splitting workers into trade unions – carpenters, electricians or bricklayers, for example – the Wobblies insisted that all construction workers struggle together to change the construction industry.

And they had little patience for union bureaucracy, fussing over union elections

continued on page 10

Scottish Wobblies demand time off



Scottish Wobblies recenty received attention for advocating a shorter work week. *The Scotsman* reports: "Although the campaign for a shorter working week is as old as the Labour movement itself, in recent years it has all but been forgotten.

"But it is about to enjoy a new lease of life as organisers get the campaign back on the road in 2005.

"'The long hours we are putting in on the job have serious consequences for our health, for our fellow workers forced onto unemployment lines, and for our ability to lead the rich, fulfilling lives that should be ours by right,' says a spokesperson for Industrial Workers of the World.

"'Our lives should not be dominated by drudgery and toil, slaving away for endless hours to make our masters rich. Sixty years of stagnation is long enough – it's time for people to once again take up their cudgels and resume the fight for shorter working hours.'

"There have been no reductions in the average working week in more than 60 years.

"Indeed, working hours have been held steady only by the rapid growth of part-time, low-paid work – the proportion of workers putting in more than 48 hours a week on the job has been steadily increasing since 1948."

Overtime plagues Finland

The average Finn works 3.4 hours a week of unpaid overtime, most put in by white-collar workers, according to a new survey. Workers at jobs suffering recent layoffs reported the most overtime. One in five said they expected the bosses to demand more of their time in the near future.

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Stan Weir: working-class visionary

BY ROBERT "GABE" GABRIELSKY

A review of *Singlejack Solidarity* by Stan Weir, edited by George Lipsitz (University of Minnesota Press, 2004, $20, available from IWW Literature Department).

Singlejack Solidarity is a collection of essays written over the course of nearly 40 years by union militant Stan Weir (1921 – 2001). The book is organized topically and Weir's writings, many autobiographical, range from reflections on his early friendship with African-American author James Baldwin to the human costs of automation, the relationship between radical intellectuals and blue collar workers, how radicals should organize themselves, and a vision for a new unionism based on organic informal work groups.

Weir received his early education in radical labor politics as a young merchant seaman during World War II, largely from veterans of the west coast maritime strikes of 1934. He was encouraged by some to join the Workers Party, a tiny radical grouping, but virtually alone in opposing political support for the war and as a consequence one of the few groups (along with the IWW) to oppose the no-strike pledge to which America's labor leadership had committed itself shortly after this nation's entry into the war.

His experiences as a merchant seaman during the war, as an activist in the wartime Workers Party, as an auto worker in the immediate post-war period, and as a participant-observer in the 1946 Oakland General Strike were to inform Weir's views about social change for the rest of his life.

In the late 1950s Weir began work as a longshoreman on the San Francisco waterfront. At the time the movement toward containerization, now the standard in every port in the world and an integral part of the effective globalization of capital, was in the planning stage and it could not have been implemented without the active cooperation of Harry Bridges, then head of the west coast longshore union, the ILWU.

Weir's opposition to containerization put him at odds with Bridges and eventually led to his being fired along with 82 other secondary level longshoremen, known as "B" men. "B" men were new hires who were not given full status in the union in the expectation that the development of containerization would lead to massive layoffs which would be more easily accomplished if low seniority workers did not have full union rights. The 83 fired "B" men fought back, organizing the Longshore Jobs Defense Committee and enlisting the aid of many prominent supporters of the struggle for union democracy. Weir served as leader and chief publicist for the Committee, a position that earned him the enmity of Bridges supporters in the progressive community to this day.

Weir's later intellectual development is best understood by contrasting his 1967 essay "USA: The Labor Revolt," with his subsequent writings on primary work groups, solidarity networks, and his critique of vanguardism. In *The Labor Revolt* Weir documents many struggles by rank-and-file unionists to democratize several different international unions which culminated in the overthrow of the top leadership in half a dozen major unions in the mid-1960s. Ironically, this was the same period when civil rights struggles and student rebellions received daily coverage in the press and on radio and television. Yet, except for stories buried on the inside pages of major dailies, these rebellions in the ranks of organized labor went unreported in the mainstream press and remained essentially unknown even in the then large and growing movement of middle class radicalism.

But it was the failure of these revolts to fundamentally transform the unions in which they occurred that caused Weir to examine the structure of unions themselves and how those structures tended to force union leaders into the conservative role of enforcing the will of the employers rather than acting as representatives of the working people who had placed them in a position of leadership. This, in turn, led Weir to an examination of the literature of management, especially the Western Electric Hawthorne experiments and subsequent related studies in which pro-management social scientists had systematically researched primary work groups.

Just as Marx "stood Hegel on his head" by applying Hegelian dialectics to material culture, Weir stood management studies on primary work groups on their head by attempting to use those studies to serve workers rather than management. This approach was most fully developed in his autobiographical essay "The Informal Work Group," first published in a collection of oral histories entitled *The Rank and File*, edited by Staughton and Alice Lynd.

Ultimately Weir became increasingly skeptical about the ability to reform existing unions simply by replacing the existing leadership with union reformers. He came to understand that the very structure of international unions themselves and the way they functioned within the framework of American labor law would have an inevitably corrupting and corrosive impact on even the most honorable of union reformers. What was necessary, he concluded, was not simply new and more honorable leadership, but a revolution in the structure of power itself. Weir looked to the work place and the ways in which workers informally organized themselves to resist management efforts at domination and control as the basis not only for a transformed labor movement, but for a fundamental transformation of work relationships and ultimately of social relationships in society as a whole.

By Weir's own account, it is unlikely that he would have developed his insights about the nature of work, the self organization of workers and a theory of social change based on primary work groups were it not for the education he received in Marxist political theory as a member of the Workers Party and later the Independent Socialist League. Weir's political tendency underwent a number of organizational changes between the 1940s and 1970s, eventually emerging as the International Socialists – essentially a group of activists that grew out of the student rebellions of the 1960s in which Weir and Hal Draper functioned as "elder statesmen" and a living connection between the student movements of the 1960s and an earlier generation of radicals from the 1930s and '40s.

Weir became increasingly skeptical about the ability to reform existing unions... He came to understand that the very structure of international unions and the way they functioned within the framework of American labor law would have an inevitably corrupting and corrosive impact on even the most honorable of union reformers.

In the mid-1970s Weir dropped away from the IS and began to systematically reflect on both his own experience in a "vanguard" political organization and the inadequacy and inappropriateness of such an organizational form for the formation of meaningful alliances between militant workers and radical intellectuals, much less fundamentally transform society democratically from below. At the same time there was a great deal of new scholarship concerning the radical labor movements of the 1930s and '40s. Having been a participant in many of these events, Weir was especially well placed to critically evaluate this new scholarship, which contributed to his own re-evaluation of the role of vanguard parties in democratic social change. This self-examination eventually led Weir to reject entirely the notion of vanguardism.

Weir began to search for alternative forms of radical organization, for ways in which militant workers and radical intellectuals might co-exist in the same organization on a more egalitarian basis. He looked enthusiastically to the rise of public sector unionism and especially to the organization of teachers, social workers and other white collar workers. He felt that such organizations would give intellectuals an independent base in the labor movement as rank and filers on their own terms. From such a base, argued Weir, white collar workers would be able to approach blue collar workers as equals, brother and sister rank and filers, rather than from the dominant hierarchal position that intellectuals had traditionally held as union staffers. Militant white and blue collar workers would be able to network as rank-and-file representatives from their respective unions. Weir also developed a theory of networking, of labor solidarity, based not on official unions, but on primary work groups and to some extent on the networking of local unions over the heads of the existing labor bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, we do not live by work alone and some of the most interesting essays in the collection are not about work at all or about the formal aspects of radical politics, but are reflections on the nature of American popular culture in the 20th century.

"After the War," written in 1990, is a recollection, 45 years after the fact, of feelings of exhilaration immediately after World War II, of being young, vital and bohemian, of his affinity for swing, traditional jazz and jitterbug dancing, and of the first instances of skepticism with the notion of vanguardism and the agonizing separation between radical intellectuals and ordinary workers, which he first began to feel in his own family who had little understanding of his affinity for the world of radical politics.

Some may view Weir's views as passé. On the contrary, Weir was quite cognizant both of the changing nature of work and of the precipitous decline of organized labor. However, unlike the leaders of the New Unity Partnership, Weir did not look to structural quick fixes or union staff as the solution to the crisis. Rather, he looked to workers in the workplace itself, confident that it was in response to the relations of production that new forms of collective struggle and resistance would emerge and could be found. In contrast, for all the liveliness in the current debate about the future of organized labor, almost none of it uses as its starting premise the workplace or an examination of forms of resistance that are developing within the ranks of organized and unorganized labor at the point of production to resist the ever-increasing threat of corporate globalization.

Weir's insightful reflections on the nature of working class culture in the 20th century, the changing nature of work and the effects of automation, the structural impediments to an effective fight back on the part of organized labor, the shortcomings of various radical organizational forms and the ever-present resistance to arbitrary power that can be found in every workplace by anyone who cares to look closely enough (including at their own behavior) makes this collection of essays required reading for all aspiring labor activists and in every college-level course in labor studies.

IWW organizing gets attention... *continued from page 9*

and contracts or asking the government for the right to negotiate.

Instead, they adopted the slogan "Direct action gets the goods." Strikes were to be used early and often. "General strikes" by workers across industries, and hopefully shutting down a whole city, were even better. ...

At the height of their power before World War I, the Wobblies boasted more than 100,000 members, who ruled the shipping and transportation industries. They were the first to advance many causes of the American labor movement, the first to include people of color in a union with white workers and the first to fight for the eight-hour day and the 40-hour week, all things that workers in America came to take for granted in the late 20th century.

They also were feared and despised by big companies, the U.S. government and the American Federation of Labor.

"They were a major threat, because they were so strong in these key industries, because they were anarchists, and they totally opposed the war," said Dana Frank, a professor of history at Merrill College. In 1917 and 1918, more than 2,000 Wobblies were jailed, many for criticizing the war.

Government crackdowns and mass arrests during World War I smashed the union, and it never really recovered to its prewar power. ... But the IWW did survive ...

Then the IWW organized a big chunk of the city of Berkeley's curbside recycling program back in 1988. For driver Dominic Moschella, joining a Wobbly shop was a natural move because he was attracted to the union's radical politics. But he also was attracted to the idea of a blue-collar job that paid a decent wage. ...

In 2002, the Wobblies expanded their membership in the recycling business, organizing the 20-person workforce at Community Conservation Centers where residential recycling is sorted by hand. After joining, workers there hammered out a contract that increased wages slightly and included full medical benefits and paid time off.

The most recent Bay Area victory was at Stonemountain and Daughter, a fabric shop on Shattuck Avenue. The workers there, mostly older women who are skilled seamstresses and knitters, formed a union two years ago. Their main complaints were of favoritism, a lack of medical benefits and a lack of respect from the owner.

With organizer Bruce Valde's help, they landed a contract in the summer of 2004. Starting pay was increased, and a regular raise schedule was put in place. The company also has made some initial steps in providing health insurance to its workers. ...

The Stockton campaign and the modest gains of shops organized in Berkeley, Portland, Chicago and other places around the country are signs of life not seen from the IWW in years.

"There is certainly a level of activity and a sense of our place in the labor movement that feels very different," said Alexis Buss, the General Secretary-Treasurer of the IWW, headquartered in Philadelphia. She said that the IWW membership has been gaining in steady, small percentages since the late 1990s. ...

The Wobblies stress that it's the workers, not the IWW organizers, who call the shots. "If you want to get something done in your shop, we're here to help. But we follow their lead," said Berkeley organizer Valde. ...

The article goes on to discuss the Starbucks campaign, ending with a few paragraphs that try to pull together the IWW's radical unionism and our work to organize on the job.

Whether it's the WTO or a single trucking company, Gill puts his faith in direct action.

"Everything in America moves on a truck at some point. An important part of trying to change the way that trade works is having the power to stop trade. That's what we did here. We said until people's rights to survive are adhered to, we're not going to move things for them."

Stopping trade, backing up demands with economic consequences, has always been the Wobbly way.

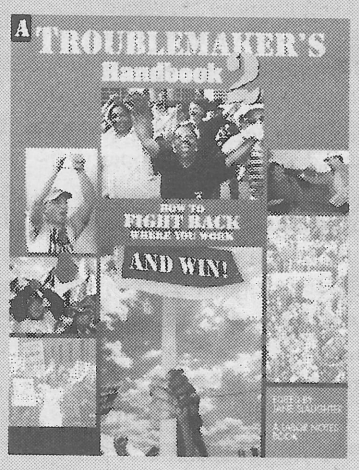
Several photos and IWW graphics ran with the article, which was much longer.

BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS



***Singlejack Solidarity* by Stan Weir**
Edited and with an afterword by George Lipsitz
Foreword by Norm Diamond
See review, page 11 ***384 pages, $20.00***

A Troublemaker's Handbook 2: How To Fight Back Where You Work – And Win! Edited by Jane Slaughter



"It's because of strategies like the ones in this book that our local won our fight to defend the Charleston Five. International solidarity, getting in touch with other locals, dealing with the media, bringing the community into the union hall – it's all in this book. I'm proud that our local was chosen to represent some of the examples." – Ken Riley, IWA Local 1422

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Just Passing Through by Paco Ignacio Taibo II

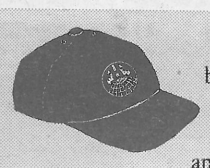
In this elegant and literate mystery adventure novel set in 1920's post-revolutionary Mexico, Paco Ignacio Taibo II is searching for a hero, specifically a leftist hero, and he thinks he has found him in the person of Sebastián San Vicente. But everyone, including the baffled novelist, is trying to figure out exactly who San Vicente really is. There is some record of San Vicente in FBI records during the Wilson era, and some mention of him in anarchist records and rumors, but the rest has to be filled in. And who better to do this than Taibo? Meanwhile, with Taibo busy in the background trying to resolve the mystery of his hero's identity, San Vicente goes about his heroic avocation of organizing strikes against the capitalists, dodging thugs and hiding out from the Mexican Army.

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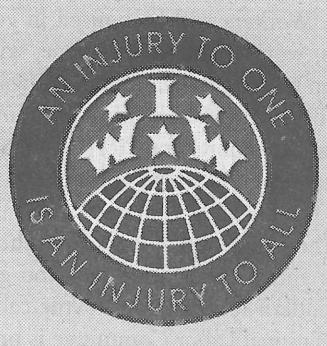
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Punching Out & Other Writings by Martin Glaberman, edited & introduced by Staughton Lynd
A collection of writings by autoworker, historian and poet Marty Glaberman. This collection reprints Glaberman's classic writings on the union movement, Marxism, the challenges facing radical movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and a selection of labor poetry. Among the gems to be found are Egghead comics, an appreciation of C.L.R. James, and of course a reprint of the classic pamphlet on business unionism, Punching Out. Glaberman celebrated the possibilities of informal work groups both to resist capitalism and to run industry once we've dumped the bosses off our backs. 231 pages, ***$14.00***

Green Bans, Red Union, Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation
by Meredith and Verity Burgmann
At the height of the Australian building industry boom in the 1970s a remarkable union campaign stopped billions of dollars worth of indiscriminate development that was turning Australian cities into concrete jungles. Enraging employers and politicians but delighting many in the wider community, the members of the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation risked their jobs in order to preserve buildings, bush and parkland. The direct impact of this "green bans" movement can be seen all over Sydney. *Green Bans, Red Union* documents the development of a union that took direct action on a number of social issues. Apart from the green bans movement, union members also used their industrial power to support the rights of oppressed groups, such as Aborigines, women and homosexuals. In telling the colorful story that inspired many environmentalists and ordinary citizens, Meredith and Verity Burgmann open a window on a period when Australian workers led the world in innovative and stunningly effective forms of environmental protest.

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Union-busting...

continued from page 1

to his home.

"It was a dirty, nasty war for almost 10 years," said Vincent Gailliard, who served as president of IUE Local 175 from 2000 until the plant closed. After years of litigation against the company, Gailliard said he's surprised to see EnerSys turn and point the finger of blame at Jackson Lewis.

"Each case we filed, we won," he said. "Eventually you think the company would decide things weren't going the right way and maybe they hadn't hired the right attorney ... The company hired Jackson Lewis to aid them in ridding themselves of the union. They gave Jackson Lewis carte blanche to rid themselves of the union. The company is not a saint in this thing."

EnerSys fired Gailliard in June 2001, during an arbitration hearing over the gain-sharing payments, accusing him of lying. EnerSys announced that same day that it was withdrawing recognition from the union. Five months later it closed the plant, blaming labor troubles for the decision.

Today the factory lies quiet and many workers remain unemployed. Jackie Clemmons, one of the earliest union supporters, told the New York Times that the firings, the pay cuts and the plant closing had all sent a powerful message. "After all this, I don't think you could pay the people here to join a union," Clemmons said. "And I don't believe the union would want to deal with us anymore down here."

The company's tactics, and its decision to sue Jackson Lewis (which insists it followed the law), led to many tangles with the labor board, and ultimately to a much more detailed picture of management's union-busting campaign than is normally available.

"Jackson Lewis is a key player in the union avoidance industry," notes Fred Feinstein, former NLRB general counsel. "This kind of aggressive anti-union campaign is not unusual."

Bonior, the head of American Rights at Work, said union-busting is big business, one that intimidates workers and has caused union membership to plummet over recent years. "One of every four union busting drives fires workers illegally," he said. "That sends a chilling message to workers."

NLRB finds massive violations at Smithfield Pork

Seven years after company terrorism defeated an organizing campaign by nearly 5,000 North Carolina pork processing workers, the National Labor Relations Board has affirmed a ruling that Smithfield engaged in an extensive and illegal campaign to suppress worker rights. The charges stem from a 1997 UFCW organizing campaign.

The Board is still considering whether to bring perjury charges against Smithfield managers, who an administrative law judge found had repeatedly lied under oath.

The NLRB found that Smithfield managers conspired with the local sheriff's Department to intimidate and assault union supporters; planned and instigated a "riot" following the vote count in 1997 that led to the false arrest of a union supporter; paid workers to spy on co-workers and turn in union supporters to management consultants; forced a management employee to produce false statements to the Board in an attempt to cover up its illegal activity; and threatened to close the plant if workers chose union representation.

The NLRB overturned the results from the 1997 election at Smithfield and ordered a new election. Ten illegally fired workers will be reinstated with back pay as compensation for their unfair discharges. The UFCW press release announcing this decision portrays it as a victory for the workers involved. It might better be seen as an illustration of the futility of trying to secure workers' rights through a legal process that believes workers are "made whole" by being returned to their jobs after seven years of litigation.

22 garment workers die in Bangladesh fire

Bangladesh's National Garments Workers Federation organized a rally Jan. 14 to protest the deaths of 22 garment workers in a January 6 fire at the Sun Knitting and Processing factory in the city of Narayanganj. Protesters demanded that safety regulations be enforced, and that criminal charges be brought against the factory managers.

"We don't want to be brought home dead any more," said garment worker Nurun Nahar. "We ardently appeal to the government to take urgent steps to save our lives."

It took firefighters four hours to extinguish the factory blaze. Dozens of workers were injured as they tried to escape down the narrow smoke-engulfed stairs. Those who died were unable to escape because many exits were blocked, and the fire extinguishers were not working.



S. Korean president insults temp workers

The Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions joined forced to denounce President Roh Moo-hyun for insulting temporary workers in his New Year's speech. The unions said Roh "debased" the dignity of non-regular workers by blaming their employment status on their "personal ability" and saying workers needed to develop their skills.

Sierra Leone: 2-day general strike

Sierra Leone's main union federation staged a two-day general strike in January to demand higher pay and better living conditions. The strike was called off after the government conceded some demands and agreed to negotiate others. These included a reduction in income taxes for low-income workers and an increase in the minimum wage of US$13 per month. The current minimum wage is no longer enough to buy a 50 kg bag of the country's staple food, rice.

The strikers, who brought business in the capital Freetown to a standstill, also demanded a reduction in the price of fuel. The government tried to head off the strike by slashing pump prices by 20 percent on the eve of the strike.

Taxis and buses stayed off the streets and most government offices and shops were shut. Hospital workers and employees of the electricity and water company also walked out.

Despite its mineral wealth, three-fourths of the country's five million people scrape by on an income of less than US$2 per day.

Bolivian general strike

Strikers shut down the Bolivian cities of Cocachamba, El Alto, La Paz and Santa Cruz in January, setting up road blocks and shutting down factories, offices and public transport to protest the government's decision to cut fuel subsidies. El Alto residents also demanded that the local water system be returned to public control. The government agreed to review the water contract if the French-owned company does not extend service to poor neighborhoods, but said it could not afford to restore fuel subsidies.

Rolling strike rocks France

A rolling campaign of public sector strikes began Jan. 11, including strikes by postal workers and a railway strike that shut down most regional service Jan. 18. Seven of France's eight rail unions struck to protest a 2005 budget that would slash 3,500 jobs.

Postal workers started the series of strikes Jan. 11 to denounce a bill to open the state-owned La Poste to outside competition in accordance with EU directives. Some 5 million teachers and civil servants were set to strike Jan. 20 to demand pay hikes and to protest pending education legislation.

The strike campaign is being seen as a key test of the unions' capacity to mobilise their forces after a year of relative social quiet. A further day of action is set for Feb. 5 to protest attacks on the 35-hour week.

The government says it will dock workers' salaries for the hours they are on strike – a novelty in French public sector disputes.

Philippines outlaws Tarlac sugar strike

Weeks after police and soldiers massacred 14 striking workers and their children on picket lines outside the Central Azucarera de Tarlac sugar complex Nov. 16, the Philippines Department of Labor and Employment has ruled the strike illegal and ordered that 35 union officials be fired. Two more strikers were killed Jan. 5 when Aquino family bodyguards reportedly open fire on picketers.

Workers have defied the back-to-work order, and have sued to have the DOLE order quashed. Unions representing farm and mill workers have been on strike since Nov. 6, demanding reinstatement of workers fired for union activity and substantial pay raises. The sugar plantation is owned by the politically prominent Aquino family, which has threatened to close it rather than negotiate with workers.

UK union sends Prince Harry Holocaust film

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis has sent Prince Harry a copy of a film that recounts the personal story of holocaust survivor Arek Hersch. UNISON is England's largest public sector workers' union.

"AREK" was produced by UNISON as part of its campaign to fight the rise of the extreme right and racism and fascism. The film also explores the link between the rise of the far right in Britain today and other human rights issues.

"Prince Harry clearly has a gap in his education," Prentis said. "I am sending him a copy of this film about a holocaust survivor to fill that gap. He should learn from it the true meaning of wearing a swastika and the catastrophic human suffering which resulted."

Working with other organisations, the union is in the process of getting the film into every secondary school in the UK. It is accompanied by a work book for teachers.

Australian court: No right to strike against contract labor

An Australian federal court has declared illegal a five-day strike at Wesfarmers' Collie mine in Western Australia last October. The Amalgamated Metal Workers Union had struck to restrict the use of subcontracted labor and seek protections against redundancies. The judge ruled that such provisions do not involve wages or working conditions, and so are not legitimate subjects of bargaining.

The decision is one of a series that will define the scope of a High Court decision in September that imposed restrictions on the right to strike. In the Electrolux case, the court ruled that a union demand for bargaining fees did not pertain to the provision of labour and so was outside the employer-employee relationship. Strike action in support of such claims are not protected, leaving unions open to compensation for the company's loss of earnings.

Guatemala: Pepsi settles

Pepsi bottling workers in Guatemala City have accepted a cash settlement amounting to some 160 percent of the amount owed for the illegal plant closing, in exchange for abandoning their campaign for reinstatement. The workers' final statement thanks unions including the IWW for their support.

China frees Stella Shoe workers

BY CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN

Seven Chinese shoe factory workers walked free in the southern city of Dongguan Dec. 31 after prison sentences of up to three-and-a-half years' were reduced to nine months, suspended for one year. Three underaged workers were also released. They had all been in jail since April 2004.

This reversal of the sentencing of the Stella International shoe factory workers – all of whom were involved in mass protests at Stella's Xing Xiong and Xing Ang factories – demonstrates for the first time that strong defense arguments by mainland Chinese lawyers, coupled with a well-coordinated campaign by labor groups and the international labor movement, can make a real difference to the fate of Chinese worker activists, even in a case involving major criminal charges.

Although the releases were ostensibly in response to legal appeals filed on the workers' behalf, lawyers representing the workers were not notified of the Dec. 31 hearing.

The defendants were convicted of "intentional destruction of property" in connection with mass protests involving thousands of workers at the Xing Xiong and Xing Ang factories owned by the Taiwanese company Stella International. Excessive working hours, low pay, frequent wage arrears and the poor quality of food provided at the factories' canteens triggered the protests.

The strikes were covered by mainland media, and the semi-official *China News Weekly* quoted a labour expert as saying that "workers should be allowed to organize themselves and to have a legal channel to express their grievances" – a proposal that coincides with *China Labour Bulletin*'s long-standing advocacy that Chinese workers be allowed to established free and independent unions.

The Stella workers also received international support from unions, anti-sweatshop campaigners, and (at their behest) some garment contractors.

After investigating workers' allegations, the Hong Kong-based *China Labour Bulletin* decided to provide legal assistance to the workers. Lawyer Gao made a powerful defense speech at the trial highlighting the underlying causes of the exploitative working conditions that led to the Stella factory workers' protest, namely the government's unqualified support for foreign investment and its neglect of workers' rights and labor standards since the start of China's economic reform over twenty years ago.

Although this case is a milestone on the journey towards workers' rights in China, we should not forget that the appeal court still maintains that the ten Stella workers are guilty of their alleged offences.

Instead of scapegoating individual workers in this way, the Chinese authorities should address the real issue of why labor unrest has become so widespread. Workers need to be able to establish their own independent unions, so that they can voice their grievances peacefully and negotiate with their employers on working conditions, wages, health and safety, and other issues of vital concern to workers around the country.

Cambodian jobs vanish

At least 20 garment factories in Cambodia have closed in the last four months, putting several thousand women out of work, as manufacturers began preparing for the end of MFA quotas that had fueled rapid expansion of the country's garment industry..

Cambodian garment workers earn about US$45 a month. Unable to compete against countries such as China on cost, Cambodia has promoted itself as a haven of worker rights, where the likes of Nike and Adidas can do business without the risk of child labor scandals. But that has turned out to have little appeal to the bosses.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Multi-Fiber Agreement

BY GREG GIORGIO, ISC

The expiration of the MFA as the new year began signals a new era of misery for some of the world's poorest, most abused workers. The MFA quotas, which served to protect jobs for garment workers in the U.S. and overseas, are gone. Three hundred thousand jobs in the U.S. are set to disappear, millions more will be affected in Mexico, Central America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. A new race to the bottom for wages, workplace rights and the ability to organize is a direct fallout of the end of the 40-year-old MFA.

The National Labor Committee in New York City reports that U.S. corporations dominant in textile and garment manufacturing are prepared to cut payments for foreign textile production by 8 to 30 percent. According to NLC Executive Director Charles Kernaghan, as many as one-half of all apparel factories overseas may close.

Bangladesh is a critical case in point. Seventy-six percent of Bangladesh's foreign currency earnings are generated from apparel exports. Some 1.8 million workers in clothing manufacturing could be put out of work. "That would be a prescription for unbelievable disaster," Kernaghan said.

Extremely repressive working conditions and the lowest average pay in the global garment industry has not prevented workers in Bangladesh from organizing and conducting creative direct action. At least seven workers were shot and killed and over 150 badly beaten at the infamous Pentax factory in Bangladesh just over a year ago. "What we find in the global economy is that you can not organize at the site of production if there's not simultaneous pressure in the marketplace, ... and if we don't raise our voices those workers can not win their rights," Kernaghan added.

The MFA's sundown shifts jobs to China, with thousand of factories planned in one of the world's most horrific situations for real worker organizing. India, Viet Nam and Pakistan are also likely to absorb shifting jobs, the common thread being low wages and the lack of effective, enforceable workplace protection.

China is working with Wal-Mart and other retailers and manufacturers to create industrial behemoths of 40,000 workers each – vertically integrated factories to process Chinese-grown cotton into cloth, cut, sewn and assembled, and shipped from the same plant. Workers will be housed in company forms, working forced overtime, with a 31 cent an hour legal minimum wage, and barred from organizing under threat of jail or worse. Kernaghan reports that Viet Nam may be able to create the new world order, post-MFA garment for 9 cents an hour!

The worst sweatshop jobs in the United States and the world are now too good for the modern robber-baron textile capitalists. The National Labor Committee is preparing recommendations to counter the laws that protect trademarks and products over human beings. This is just one step in raising consciousness of a growing, unprecedented attack on the working class.

The International Solidarity Commission of the IWW will continue to explore these issues. You can also get more detailed information from www.nlcnet.org.